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Bragelonne hurls De Wardes over the Barrier.

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE

Being Adventures of

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Volume One

The D'Artagnan Romances, v.9

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THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER I.

A PROCESSION AT VANNES.

The passage from Belle-Isle to Sarzeau was made rapidly enough, thanks to one of those little corsairs of which D'Artagnan had been told during his voyage, and which, shaped for fast sailing and destined for the chase, were sheltered at that time in the road of Locmaria, where one of them, with a quarter of its war-crew, did service between Belle-Isle and the Continent. D'Artagnan had an opportunity of convincing himself once more that Porthos, though engineer and topographer, was not deeply versed in affairs of State. His entire ignorance, with any other, might have passed for well-informed dissimulation. But D'Artagnan knew too well all the folds and the refolds of his Porthos not to find a secret if there were one there, — like those regular, minute old bachelors, who know how to find, with their eyes shut, each book on the shelves of their library, and each piece of linen in the drawers of their commode. Then, if he had found nothing, that sly D'Artagnan, in rolling and unrolling his Porthos, it was because, in truth, there was nothing to be found.

"Be it so," said D'Artagnan; "I shall know more at Vannes in half an hour than Porthos has known at Belle-Isle in two months. Only, in order that I may know

something, it is important that Porthos does not make use of the only stratagem I leave at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my arrival."

All the vigilance of the musketeer was then, for the moment, devoted to watching Porthos. And let us hasten to say, Porthos did not deserve all this mistrust. Porthos had no thoughts of evil. Perhaps, on first seeing him, D'Artagnan had inspired him with a little suspicion; but almost immediately D'Artagnan had reconquered in that good and brave heart the place he had always occupied, and not the least cloud darkened the great eye of Porthos, fixed from time to time with fondness on his friend.

On landing, Porthos inquired if his horses were waiting, and he soon perceived them at the crossing of the road which turns round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that little town, leads towards Vannes. These horses were two in number, — one for M. du Vallon, and one for his equerry; for Porthos had an equerry since Mousqueton could use only a carriage as a means of locomotion. D'Artagnan expected that Porthos would propose to send forward his equerry upon one horse to bring back another horse, and he (D'Artagnan) had made up his mind to oppose this proposition. But nothing which D'Artagnan had expected happened. Porthos simply ordered the servant to dismount and await his return at Sarzeau, while D'Artagnan would ride his horse, — which was done.

"Eh! but you are quite a man of foresight, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan to his friend, when he found himself in the saddle upon the equerry's horse.

"Yes; but this is a kindness on the part of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my disposal."

"Good horses for bishop's horses, *mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan. "It is true, Aramis is a bishop of a peculiar kind."

"He is a holy man!" replied Porthos, in a tone almost nasal, raising his eyes towards heaven.

"Then he is much changed," said D'Artagnan; "for you and I have known him tolerably profane."

"Grace has touched him," said Porthos.

"Bravo!" said D'Artagnan; "that redoubles my desire to see him, this precious Aramis!" and he spurred his horse, which sprang off with renewed speed.

"*Peste!*" said Porthos, "if we go on at this rate, we shall take only one hour instead of two."

"To go how far do you say, Porthos?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"That will be a good pace."

"I could have embarked you on the canal, but the devil take rowers and boat-horses! The first are like tortoises, the second like snails; and when a man is able to put a good horse between his knees, that horse is worth more than rowers or any other means."

"You are right, — you, above all, Porthos, who always look magnificent on horseback."

"A little heavy, my friend; I was weighed the other day."

"And what do you weigh?"

"Three hundred-weight!" said Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

"So that you must perceive that I am forced to choose horses whose loins are straight and wide; otherwise I break them down in two hours."

"Yes; giant's horses you must have, must you not?"

"You are very polite, my friend," replied the engineer, with affectionate majesty.

"As a case in point," replied D'Artagnan, "your horse seems to sweat already."

"*Dame!* it is hot. Ah! do you see Vannes now?"

"Yes, perfectly. It is a handsome city, apparently."

"Charming, — according to Aramis, at least; it is too dark-colored to please me. But black seems to be considered handsome by artists; I am very sorry for it."

"Why so, Porthos?"

"Because I have lately had my château of Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan; "but white is more cheerful."

"Yes; but it is less august, as Aramis tells me. Fortunately there are dealers in black as well as white. I will have Pierrefonds replastered in black, that is all. If gray is handsome, you understand, my friend, black must be superb."

"*Dame!*" said D'Artagnan, "that appears logical."

"Were you never at Vannes, D'Artagnan?"

"Never."

"Then you do not know the city?"

"No."

"Well, look!" said Porthos, raising himself in his stirrups, which made the fore-quarters of his horse bend sadly; "do you see that spire in the sunlight yonder?"

"Yes, I see it plainly."

"That is the cathedral."

"Which is called —"

"St. Pierre. Now look again! In the faubourg on the left do you see another cross?"

"Perfectly well."

"That is St. Paterne, the parish preferred by Aramis."

"Indeed!"

"Without doubt. Saint Paterne, you see, passes for

having been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis pretends that he was not; but he is so learned that that may be only a paro — a para —"

"Paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely; thank you! My tongue trips, it is so hot."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "continue your interesting description, I beg. What is that large white building with many windows?"

"Oh! that is the college of the Jesuits. *Pardieu!* you have a lucky hand. Do you see, close to the college, a large house with steeples and turrets, and built in a handsome Gothic style, as that brute, M. Gétard, says?"

"Yes, I see. Well?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides."

"What! does he not reside at the episcopal palace?"

"No; that is in ruins. The palace, likewise, is in the city, and Aramis prefers the faubourg. That is why, as I told you, he is partial to St. Paterne; St. Paterne is in the faubourg. Besides, there are in this faubourg a mall, a tennis-court, and a house of Dominicans, — see! the one whose handsome steeple rises to the heavens."

"Well?"

"Next, you see, the faubourg is like a separate city; it has its walls, its towers, its ditches; the quay is upon it, likewise, and the boats land at the quay. If our little corsair did not draw eight feet of water, we could have come full sail up to Aramis's windows."

"Porthos, Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, "you are a well of knowledge, a spring of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me; you confound me."

"Here we are, arrived," said Porthos, turning the conversation with his usual modesty.

"And high time we were," thought D'Artagnan, "for Aramis's horse is melting away like a horse of ice."

They entered almost at the same instant into the faubourg; but scarcely had they gone a hundred paces when they were surprised to find the streets strewed with leaves and flowers. Against the old walls of Vannes were hung the oldest and the strangest tapestries of France. Over iron balconies fell long white sheets stuck all over with bouquets. The streets were deserted; it was plain that the whole population was assembled at one point. The blinds were closed, and the breeze penetrated into the houses under the hangings, which cast long black shadows between their places of issue and the walls. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, chants struck the ears of the newly arrived travellers. A crowd in holiday garb appeared through the vapors of incense which mounted to the heavens in blue flakes, and clouds of rose-leaves flew up as high as the first stories. Above all heads were to be seen the cross and banners, the sacred symbols of religion. Then, beneath those crosses and banners, as if protected by them, was a whole world of young girls, clothed in white, and crowned with corn-flowers. At the two sides of the street, enclosing the *cortége*, marched the guards of the garrison, carrying bouquets in the barrels of their muskets and on the points of their lances. This was a procession.

While D'Artagnan and Porthos were looking on with becoming pious ardor, which disguised an extreme impatience to push forward, a magnificent daïs approached, preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitentiary, and twelve canons. A chanter with a thundering voice — a chanter certainly picked out from all the voices of France, as was the drum-major of the Imperial Guard from all the giants of the empire — a chanter escorted by four other chanters, who appeared to

be there only to serve him as an accompaniment — made the air resound, and the windows of all the houses vibrate. Under the daïs appeared a pale and noble countenance, with black eyes, black hair streaked with threads of silver, a delicate, compressed mouth, a prominent and angular chin. This head, full of graceful majesty, was covered with the episcopal mitre, — a head-dress which gave it, in addition to the character of sovereignty, that of asceticism and evangelic meditation.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, as this lofty countenance passed before him.

The prelate started at the sound of the voice. He raised his large black eyes with their long lashes, and turned them without hesitation towards the spot whence the exclamation proceeded. At a glance he saw Porthos and D'Artagnan close to him. On his part, D'Artagnan, thanks to the keenness of his sight, had seen all, grasped all. The full portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, never to leave it. One thing had particularly struck D'Artagnan. On perceiving him, Aramis had colored; then he had concentrated under his eyelids the fiery look of the master, and the affectionate look of the friend. It was evident that Aramis addressed this question to himself: "Why is D'Artagnan there with Porthos, and what does he want at Vannes?" Aramis comprehended all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan, on turning his look upon him again, and seeing that he had not lowered his eyes. He knew the acuteness and intelligence of his friend; he feared to let him divine the secret of his blush and his astonishment. He was still the same Aramis, always having a secret to conceal. Therefore, to put an end to this searching examination, which it was necessary to get rid of at all events, as at any price a general silences the fire of a battery which annoys him.

Aramis stretched forth his beautiful white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst of the pastoral ring; he cut the air with the sign of the cross, and poured out his benediction upon his two friends. Perhaps, thoughtful and absent, D'Artagnan, impious in spite of himself, might not have bent beneath this holy benediction; but Porthos saw his distraction, and laying his friendly hand upon the back of his companion, crushed him down towards the earth. D'Artagnan was forced to give way; indeed, he was little short of being flat on the ground. In the mean time Aramis had passed. D'Artagnan, like Antæus, had only touched the ground, and he turned towards Porthos, quite ready to quarrel with him. But there was no mistaking the intention of the brave Hercules; it was a feeling of religious propriety that had influenced him. Besides, speech with Porthos, instead of disguising his thought, always revealed it.

"It is very polite of him," said he, "to have given his benediction to us alone. Decidedly, he is a holy man and a brave man."

Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan made no reply.

"Observe, my friend," continued Porthos, "he has seen us; and instead of continuing to walk on at the simple pace of the procession, as he did just now, — see what a hurry he is in! Do you see how the *cortége* is increasing its speed? He is eager to come to us and to embrace us, is that dear Aramis!"

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan, aloud. Then to himself: "It is equally true that he has seen me, the fox, and will have time to prepare himself to receive me."

But the procession had passed; the road was free. D'Artagnan and Porthos walked straight up to the episcopal palace, which was surrounded by a numerous crowd,

anxious to see the prelate return. D'Artagnan noticed that this crowd was composed principally of citizens and military men. He recognized in the character of these partisans his friend's address. Aramis was not the man to seek for a useless popularity. He cared very little for being beloved by people who could be of no service to him. The train of ordinary pastors — that is to say, women, children, and old men — was not the train for him.

Ten minutes after the two friends had passed the threshold of the palace, Aramis returned like a triumphant conqueror; the soldiers presented arms to him as to a superior officer; the citizens bowed to him as to a friend and patron, rather than as a head of the Church. There was something in Aramis resembling those Roman senators who had their doors always surrounded by clients. At the foot of the steps he had a conference of half a minute with a Jesuit, who in order to speak to him more secretly passed his head under the daïs. He then entered his palace; the doors closed slowly, and the crowd melted away, while chants and prayers were still resounding abroad. It was a magnificent day. Earthly perfumes were mingled with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The city breathed happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had, all-powerfully, created this strength, this joy, this happiness, and spread everywhere these perfumes.

"Oh!" said he to himself, "Porthos has got fat, but Aramis has grown taller."

CHAPTER II.

THE GRANDEUR OF THE BISHOP OF VANNES.

Porthos and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D'Artagnan as guide. The worthy baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgment of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who exercised a moral influence over him, — a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion, — for these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of his Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D'Artagnan remarked at once in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and the officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that his Greatness had just returned to his apartments, and was preparing to appear, in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock.

After a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking at the whites of each other's eyes, and twirling their thumbs in all possible different evolutions, a door of the hall opened, and his Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress complete of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command; his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine

mustache and the lengthened imperial of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which among elegant men and women of high fashion never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural emanation. Only, in this case the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the room, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which whatever it might be would have been cold on such an occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most mistrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D'Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal warmth. Porthos grasped the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D'Artagnan noticed that his Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already a dozen times had injured his fingers, covered with rings, by bruising his flesh in the vice of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and presented only flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed against gold or the facets of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D'Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. The manœuvre, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this manœuvre; but he did not

appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but precisely because he was caught, he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it was of little moment to him, old *condottière* as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. It was Aramis who began the conversation.

"Ah, dear friend! my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what a fortunate chance!"

"It is a chance, my reverend companion," said D'Artagnan, "that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you."

"Ah! indeed," said Aramis, with no outburst, "you have been seeking me?"

"Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis," said Porthos; "and the proof is that he has hunted me up at Belle-Isle. That is kind, is it not?"

"Ah! yes," said Aramis, "at Belle-Isle! certainly."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack."

"At Belle-Isle!" said Aramis, "in that hole, in that desert! That is kind indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D'Artagnan set his lips with a subtilty almost ironical. "Yes, I knew, but I wished to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if on seeing each other our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which welcomes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes; Porthos said, 'Hush!' and you —"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Most certainly."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air.

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that; I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eye over Aramis, "you have not buried yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only, I do not admit the word 'buried.'"

"But it seems to me that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have

found them here. What is there more beautiful and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica? I find here, dear D'Artagnan, all that is unlike what I formerly loved; and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is unlike the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to greet me here, now and then, without diverting me from the way of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise, and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis, smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak! What brings you hither? May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan; "it is nothing of that kind, — I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you, nor Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe — particularly on seeing his old friend in such humble guise — that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour for explanations had come, related the story of his English adventures. During the narration he saw, a dozen times, the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan, it was enthusiasm, it was delirium.

When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see that I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart approves, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm his look, he could not this time support that of Aramis. He therefore allowed his eye to stray towards Porthos, — like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure and seeks another passage.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular travelling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me!" cried Aramis. "Me! During the year that I have been here I have not once crossed the sea."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "I did not know you were so domestic."

"Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the man of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age, — parleys with death. I abide, my dear D'Artagnan, I abide."

"Well, that is all the better, my friend; for we shall probably become neighbors."

"Bah!" said Aramis, with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. "You, my neighbor!"

"*Mordioux!* yes."

"How so?"

"I am about to purchase some very profitable salt-mines, which are situated between Pirial and Le Croisic. Imagine, my friend, working at a clear profit of twelve per cent! Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses;

the ocean, faithful and regular, bringing every six hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamed of such a speculation. Do not divulge the matter, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the subject. I am to have three leagues of territory for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were indeed true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and a fresh defence. "I heard that you had had some difference with the Court," said he, "but that you had come out of it, as you know how to come out of everything, D'Artagnan, with the honors of war."

"I!" exclaimed the musketeer, with a great burst of laughter that could not conceal his embarrassment; for from these words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. — "I! oh, tell me all about that, pray, my dear Aramis?"

"Yes; it was related to me, a poor bishop lost in the middle of the moors, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you, one morning, over the bridge of Blois, to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation."

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing could be more sincere."

"It was then that you went to the Comte de la Fère's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then to Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No; I did not know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man! what you wanted to propose to us four to do. I suspected you had had something to do in that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he spoke of you as a friend, or rather as a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil could you learn all that?" demanded D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigations of Aramis would extend further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night-watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man every night lights a lantern to direct the boats which come from sea. He is concealed in his watch-tower, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest, he divines their presence, he calls them, he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher; from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all that I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, — I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a watch-tower."

"Well, what did I do after I came from England?"

"Ah!" replied Aramis, "there you get out of my sight. I know nothing of you since your return, D'Artagnan; my sight grows thick. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again; and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* the very day before my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! what was it?"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Grève, and in consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window as he would have thrown out a bale of cotton."

"Come, that's pretty well!" said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" inquired Porthos.

D'Artagnan noticed upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of two farmers of the revenues, friends of M. Fouquet, whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"Messieurs d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know those names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then?" cried Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Why, it seems to me—"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now, M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death."

"That may be," said Porthos; "but in the place of M. Fouquet—"

Aramis, fearing that Porthos was about to say something awkward, interrupted him: "Come, D'Artagnan!" said he, "this is quite enough about other people; let us talk a little about yourself."

"Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary, let me hear a little about you, Aramis."

"I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me."

"Nor of the Abbé d'Herblay even?"

"No, not even of him. You see a man whom God has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for."

"God?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange! I have been told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you that?" cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent a slight flush coloring his cheeks.

"Why, Bazin, in faith!"

"The fool!"

"Indeed, I do not say he is a man of genius; but he told me so, and after him I repeat it to you."

"I have never seen M. Fouquet," replied Aramis, with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

"Well; but if you have seen him and even known him, there is no harm in that," replied D'Artagnan. "M. Fouquet is a very good sort of man."

"Humph!"

"A great politician."

Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I hold only of the king and the Pope," said Aramis.

"*Dame!* listen then," said D'Artagnan, in the most natural tone imaginable. "I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's; the salt-mines I have bought are M. Fouquet's; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet's; the garrison is M. Fouquet's; the galleys are M. Fouquet's. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is another master than the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as a king."

"Thank God! I am not enfeoffed to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own," replied Aramis, who during this conversation followed with his eye every gesture of D'Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D'Artagnan was impassive and Porthos motionless. The thrusts aimed so skilfully were parried by an able adversary; not

one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of it all. He had remained motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper; but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D'Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis feigned astonishment at every word of politics D'Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D'Artagnan, as the eternal mistrust of D'Artagnan provoked the suspicions of Aramis. At length D'Artagnan designedly let fall the name of Colbert; he had reserved that stroke for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that is too strong! We must be careful, *mordioux!* we must be careful."

D'Artagnan then gave Aramis all the information respecting Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather the conversation, was prolonged till one o'clock in the morning, between D'Artagnan and Aramis. At ten o'clock precisely Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair, and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up, and they sent him to bed. "Hum!" said he, "it seems to me that I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting, what you were talking about."

At one o'clock Aramis conducted D'Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the

episcopal palace. Two servants were placed at his command. "To-morrow, at eight o'clock," said he, taking leave of D'Artagnan, "we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said D'Artagnan; "so late?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," said Aramis.

"That is true."

"Good-night, dear friend!" and he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D'Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door was closed, "Good!" said he, "at five o'clock I will be on foot."

Then, this determination being made, he went to bed, and "folded the pieces together," as people say.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PORTHOS BEGINS TO BE SORRY FOR HAVING COME WITH D'ARTAGNAN.

SCARCELY had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos' room. The giant, who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out upon the eider-down. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which with Porthos was proof against the noise of bells or the report of cannon; his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing motion of a ship. A moment more, and Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened the sound of his steps; and besides, Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. Aramis laid one hand on the sleeper's shoulder. "Rouse!" said he; "wake up, my dear Porthos!" The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice, — it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated a danger.

Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the profoundness of his sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" said he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back again, fixing his great eyes in terror upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like those children who contend with their nurse to gain an hour or two more sleep.

"Thirty hours' riding," added Aramis, firmly. "You know there are good relays."

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

"Come, come, my friend!" insisted the prelate, with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. "And is it absolutely necessary that I should go?" said he.

"Urgently necessary."

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with steps like the weight of a marble statue.

"Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!" said Aramis; "you will wake somebody."

"Ah! that's true," replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, "I forgot that; but never fear, I will be careful;" and so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a ringing and prolonged noise. This noise made the

blood of Aramis boil, while it provoked in Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. "How droll that is!" said he, in the same voice.

"Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud!"

"True, true!" and he lowered his voice a half-note.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent."

"Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongues."

"You see I am doing my best," said Porthos, drawing on his trunk hose.

"Very well."

"This seems to be something urgent?"

"It is more than that; it is serious, Porthos."

"Oh!"

"D'Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?"

"Questioned me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Are you sure of that, Porthos?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself."

"He asked me what I was doing, and I told him, — studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"Of castrametation?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Gétard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed; I had rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay; but our friend has very keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the necessity is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning, you will have gone fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skilful *valet de chambre* could have done. Porthos, half confused, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and was lost in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing his running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He at the same time pinched the horse's nose, to prevent him from neighing. When they had arrived at the outer gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for, "Now, Friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he, in his ear: "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, sleep on horseback, but lose not a minute!"

"That 's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before midday."

"He shall have it."

"And do not forget one thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding after your title of duke and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours in that case."

"Try to do so."

"Then let go the bridle; and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, — not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, and the maddened animal set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes; then, when he was completely out of sight, re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The valet placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own.

D'Artagnan really suspected nothing, therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning about half-past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not yet left their roosts. Not a servant appeared. All the doors were closed.

"Good! perfect quiet!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind; I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done;" and D'Artagnan dressed himself. But this time he did not study to give to the costume of M. Agnan that plain and almost ecclesiastical

appearance he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person somewhat of that military character the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or rather affected to make free, with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony.

Aramis was asleep, or feigned to be asleep. A large book lay open upon his night-desk; a wax-light was still burning above its silver tray. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the innocence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos, — he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly, required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! Faith! sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a military habit of waking with the day sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep?" said Aramis. "Take care! I had reckoned upon them; and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that formerly you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess that it is not for the sake of sleeping that you have put me off till eight o'clock."

"I was afraid you would laugh at me if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearances than a simple clerk."

"*Mordioux!* Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! Hurrah for appearances, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon it me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I have allowed to escape me."

"Must I leave you, then?"

"I want time for meditation, my friend."

"Well, I will leave you; but for the sake of that poor pagan called D'Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg: I thirst for speech of you."

"Well, D'Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half—"

"An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible."

Aramis began to laugh. "Still agreeable, still young, still gay," said he. "You have come into my diocese to set me quarrelling with grace."

"Bah!"

"And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit his lips. "Well," said he, "I will take the sin on my own head; favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross and hurry through with one pater, and we will set out."

"Hush!" said Aramis, "we are no longer alone; I hear strangers coming up."

"Well, dismiss them."

"Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday. It is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff? Well, so be it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to wake Porthos, and wait in his company till you have finished the conference."

Aramis did not stir; his brow remained unbent; he betrayed himself by no gesture or word. "Go," said he, as D'Artagnan advanced to the door. "By the way, do you know where Porthos sleeps?"

"No, but I can inquire."

"Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thank you; *au revoir!*" and D'Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation in which he had found him

formerly in the inn at Crèvecœur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

"What is it?" said Aramis, quietly. "You have, apparently, something to say to me, my friend."

"It is," replied D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, — "it is that Porthos is not in his apartment."

"Indeed!" said Aramis, calmly; "are you sure?"

"*Pardieu!* I came from his chamber."

"Where can he be, then?"

"That is what I ask you."

"And have you not inquired?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what answer did you get?"

"That Porthos, often going out of a morning without saying anything to anybody, had probably gone out."

"What did you do then?"

"I went to the stables," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly.

"What for?"

"To see if Porthos had gone out on horseback."

"And had he?" interrogated the bishop.

"Well, there is a horse missing, — stall No. 5, Goliath."

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not free from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

"Oh! I see how it is," said Aramis, after having considered for a moment; "Porthos has gone out to give us a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes. The canal which leads from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos' favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for our breakfast."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else can he have gone? I would lay a wager that he took a gun with him."

"That is possible," said D'Artagnan.

"Do one thing, my friend: get on horseback, and join him."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan; "I will."

"Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"No, thank you. Porthos is easily recognizable; I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebuse?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it; use my establishment as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When about to pass through the door, the servant stepped aside to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A contraction of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan that he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the clatter of the hoofs on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" demanded the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see on the moors or on the beach the colossal form of his friend Porthos. He persisted in fancying that he could trace a horse's step in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined that he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three

hours: during two of them he went forward in search of his friend; in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have passed each other," said he, "and I shall find the two good fellows waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken; he no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the banks of the canal. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned.

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have induced you to make such a useless search; but about seven o'clock the almoner of St. Paterne came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Gétard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to cross over to Belle-Isle."

"But, tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, surely?"

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blandest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back."

In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a rôle of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more and more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the

Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous: excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimbœuf, and delicious game from the moors constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After breakfast, —

"You offered me an arquebuse," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it to me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"While waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the rack."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till midday."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but be sure to come back to dinner."

"*Pardieu!* the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back."

Thereupon D'Artagnan took leave of his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebuse, but, instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked back to see if anybody was following him, but saw no one. He chartered a little fishing-boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true. He had

not been followed; but a Jesuit brother, stationed in the top of the steeple of his church and aided by an excellent glass, had not, since the morning, lost sight of one of his steps. At a quarter to twelve Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing towards Belle-Isle.

The voyage was rapid; a good north-northeast wind drove him towards the isle. As he gradually approached, his eyes were searching the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications, the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos might be standing out against the slightly clouded sky. But his search was in vain; he landed without having seen anything, and learned from the first soldier interrogated by him that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D'Artagnan ordered his little boat to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day: it had gone round from north-northeast to southeast; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had reached the Continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D'Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that passage, only the deck of the vessel upon which he stamped backward and forward for three hours could relate to history. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the suddenness of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, — with reserve, but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short, — thanks to that force of expression which is to mysteries

what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts, — to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found in the vestibule of the palace the *valet de chambre*, who closed the passage, while smiling upon him with a sanctimonious air.

"Monseigneur?" cried D'Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Staggered for an instant, the valet resumed his perpendicular.

"Monseigneur?" said he.

"Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, idiot?"

"Yes; you are the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Then let me pass."

"It is of no use."

"Why of no use?"

"Because his Greatness is not at home."

"What! his Greatness is not at home? where is he, then?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but perhaps he tells Monsieur the Chevalier."

"And how? where? in what way?"

"In this letter which he gave me for Monsieur the Chevalier;" and the *valet de chambre* drew a letter from his pocket.

"Give it to me, then, you rascal!" said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read: —

AR FRIEND, — An affair of the most urgent nature calls
a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again
re I set out; but I lose that hope on thinking that you are
o doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle,

with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better and for a longer time profited by your excellent company.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But let them laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped, like a monkey cheated with an empty nutshell!" and with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the still grinning *valet de chambre*, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter, was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan therefore took the post, and chose a horse, which he made to understand, with good spurs and a light hand, that stags are not the most agile coursers in creation.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN MAKES ALL SPEED, PORTHOS SNORES, AND ARAMIS COUNSELS.

FROM thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having forbidden interruption, was working in the cabinet of his house at St. Mandé, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage drawn by four horses streaming with sweat entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was probably expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. While M. Fouquet rose from his desk and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the lackey upon whom he was not leaning sprang up the steps and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door, Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes," said he.

"Very well," replied his master.

Then, leaning over the baluster of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps, "You, dear friend!" said he, "you, so soon!"

"Yes; I myself, Monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see."

"Oh, my poor, dear friend!" said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, upon which Aramis leaned, while the servants drew back with respect.

"Bah!" replied Aramis, "it is nothing, since I am here. The principal thing was that I should get here, and here I am."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of his cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"No one can listen to us; no one can hear us?"

"Have no fear; nobody."

"Has M. du Vallon arrived?"

"Yes."

"And you have received my letter?"

"Yes. The affair is serious, apparently, since it necessitates your presence in Paris at a moment when your presence was so needed out there."

"You are right; it cannot be more serious."

"Thank you! thank you! What is it about? But, for God's sake! before anything else, take time to breathe, dear friend! You are so pale, you frighten me."

"I am really in great pain. But, for Heaven's sake, think nothing about me. Did M. du Vallon tell you nothing, when he delivered the letter to you?"

"No. I heard a great noise; I went to the window; I saw at the foot of the steps as it were a horseman of marble; I went down, he held the letter out to me, and his horse fell down dead."

"But he?"

"He fell with the horse; he was lifted up, and carried to an apartment. Having read the letter, I went up to him, in hopes of obtaining more ample information; but he was asleep, and after such a fashion that it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him, and gave orders that his boots should be taken off, and that he should be left quite undisturbed."

"Very good; now, this is the question in hand, Monseigneur. You have seen M. d'Artagnan in Paris, have you not?"

"Certainly, and think him a man of intelligence, and even a man of heart, although he did bring about the death of our dear friends Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Alas! yes, I heard of that. At Tours I met the courier who was bringing me the letter from Gourville and the despatches from Pellisson. Have you seriously considered that event, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And in it you perceived a direct attack upon your sovereignty?"

"Do you believe it to be so?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Well, I must confess that gloomy idea occurred to me also."

"Do not blind yourself, Monsieur, in the name of Heaven! Listen attentively to me. I return to D'Artagnan."

"I am all attention."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"He came here for money."

"With what kind of order?"

"With an order from the king."

"Direct?"

"Signed by his Majesty."

"There, then! Well, D'Artagnan has been to Belle-Isle; he was disguised; he passed for some sort of a steward, charged by his master to purchase salt-mines. Now, D'Artagnan has no other master than the king; he came, then, sent by the king. He saw Porthos."

"Who is Porthos?"

"I beg your pardon, I made a mistake. He saw M. du

Vallon at Belle-Isle; and he knows, as well as you and I do, that Belle-Isle is fortified."

"And you think that the king sent him there?" said Fouquet, thoughtfully.

"I certainly do."

"And D'Artagnan, in the hands of the king, is a dangerous instrument?"

"The most dangerous imaginable."

"Then I formed a correct opinion of him at the first glance."

"How so?"

"I wished to attach him to myself."

"If you judged him to be the bravest, the most acute, and the most adroit man in France, you have judged correctly."

"He must be ours, then, at any price."

"D'Artagnan?"

"Is not that your opinion?"

"It may be my opinion, but you will never have him."

"Why?"

"Because we have allowed the time to go by. He was dissatisfied with the court; we should have profited by that. Since that, he has been over to England; there he powerfully assisted in the restoration, and gained a fortune; since then he has returned to the service of the king. Well, the reason of his return to the service of the king is that he has been well paid for the service."

"We will pay him still better, that is all."

"Oh, Monsieur, excuse me; D'Artagnan has a high sense of his word, and where that word is once engaged, it remains inviolable."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Fouquet, with great uneasiness.

"That, for the present, the principal thing is to parry a dangerous blow.'

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Listen. D'Artagnan will come and render an account to the king of his mission."

"Oh, we have time enough to think about that."

"How so?"

"You have a good start of him, I presume?"

"Nearly ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours —"

Aramis shook his weary head. "Look at those clouds which flit across the sky, at those swallows which cut the air. D'Artagnan moves more quickly than the cloud or the bird; D'Artagnan is the wind which carries them."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you that man is something superhuman, Monsieur. He is of my age, and I have known him these five-and-thirty years."

"Well?"

"Well, listen to my calculation, Monsieur. I sent M. du Vallon off to you at two hours after midnight. M. du Vallon was eight hours in advance of me; when did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"About four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I gained four upon him; and yet Porthos is a stanch horseman, and has left on the road eight dead horses, whose bodies I passed one after another. I rode post fifty leagues. But I have the gout, the gravel, and what else I know not; so that fatigue kills me. I was obliged to dismount at Tours; since that, rolling along in a carriage, half dead, sometimes overturned, often drawn upon the sides and sometimes on the back of the carriage, always with four spirited horses at full gallop, I have arrived, — arrived, gaining

four hours upon Porthos. But, look you, D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundredweight, as Porthos does; D'Artagnan has not the gout and the gravel, as I have; he is not a horseman, he is a centaur. D'Artagnan, look you, set out for Belle-Isle when I set out for Paris; and D'Artagnan, notwithstanding the ten hours' start that I have, will arrive within two hours after me."

"But, then, accidents?"

"He never meets with any accidents."

"Horses may fail him."

"He will run as fast as a horse."

"Good God! what a man!"

"Yes, he is a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he represents to me the culminating point of human powers: but while loving and admiring him, I fear him, and am on my guard against him. Now, then, I resume, Monsieur. In two hours D'Artagnan will be here: be beforehand with him. Go to the Louvre, and see the king before he sees D'Artagnan."

"What shall I say to the king?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay! M. d'Herblay!" cried Fouquet, "what projects are crushed all at once!"

"After one project has failed, there is always another which may lead to good; we should never despair. Go, Monsieur, and go quickly."

"But that garrison, so carefully chosen, the king will change it directly."

"That garrison, Monsieur, was the king's when it entered Belle-Isle; it is yours to-day. It will be the same with all garrisons after a fortnight's occupation. Let things go on, Monsieur. Do you see any inconvenience in having an army at the end of a year, instead of

one or two regiments? Do you not see that your garrison of to-day will make you partisans at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, — everywhere they may be placed? Go to the king, Monsieur; go! Time flies; and D'Artagnan, while we are losing our time, is flying like an arrow along the highroad."

"M. d'Herblay, you know that each word from you is a germ which fructifies in my thoughts. I will go to the Louvre."

"Instantly, will you not?"

"I ask time only to change my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan has no need to pass through St. Mandé, but will go straight to the Louvre; that is cutting off an hour from the advance which remains to us."

"D'Artagnan may have everything except my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes;" and without losing a second, Fouquet gave orders for his departure.

Aramis had only time to say to him, "Return as quickly as you go; for I shall await you impatiently."

Five minutes after, the superintendent was flying along the road to Paris. During this time Aramis desired to be shown the chamber in which Porthos was sleeping. At the door of Fouquet's cabinet he was folded in the arms of Pellisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to see him. Aramis received, with that friendly dignity which he knew so well how to assume, Pellisson's caresses, which were as respectful as they were earnest; but, all at once, stopping on the landing-place, "What is that I hear up yonder?" he demanded.

There was, in fact, a hoarse, growling kind of noise, like the roar of a hungry tiger or an impatient lion.

"Oh, that is nothing," said Pellisson, smiling.

"Well; but —"

"It is M. du Vallon snoring."

"Of course," said Aramis; "no one but he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pellisson, to inquire if he is in need of anything."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?"

"Oh, certainly!" and both entered the chamber. Porthos was stretched upon a bed, his face violet rather than red, his eyes swelled, his mouth wide open. The roaring which escaped from the deep cavities of his chest made the panes of the windows vibrate. To those intense and clearly defined muscles starting from his face, to his hair matted with sweat, to the violent heaving of his chin and shoulders, it was impossible to refuse a certain degree of admiration. Strength carried to that point is almost divinity. The herculean legs and feet of Porthos had, by swelling, burst his leather boots; all the strength of his huge body was converted into the rigidity of stone. Porthos moved no more than does the giant of granite which reclines upon the plains of Agrigentum. According to Pellisson's orders, his boots had been cut off, for no human power could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as if they were capstans; and yet all this did not awaken him. They had taken off his boots in fragments, and his legs had fallen back upon the bed. They had then cut off the rest of his clothes, and carried him to a bath, in which they let him lie a considerable time. They had put on him clean linen, and placed him in a well-warmed bed, — all this with an amount of exertion and movement which might have roused a dead man, but which did not make Porthos open an eye, or interrupt for a second his formidable snoring. Aramis on his part, with his hard

and nervous nature, armed with extraordinary courage, tried to outbrave fatigue, and employ himself with Gourville and Pellisson, but he fainted in the chair in which he had persisted in remaining. They took him up and carried him into an adjoining room, where repose upon a bed soon calmed his throbbing brain.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH M. FOUQUET ACTS.

In the mean time Fouquet was hastening to the Louvre, at the best speed of his English horses.

The king was employed with Colbert. All at once the king became thoughtful. The two sentences of death he had signed on mounting his throne sometimes recurred to his memory; they were two black spots which he saw with his eyes open, two spots of blood which he saw when his eyes were closed. "Monsieur," said he, all at once, to the intendant, "it sometimes seems to me that those two men you made me condemn were not very great culprits."

"Sire, they were picked out from the herd of the farmers of the revenue, which wanted decimating."

"Picked out by whom?"

"By necessity, Sire," replied Colbert, coldly.

"Necessity! a great word!" murmured the young king.

"A great goddess, Sire."

"They were devoted friends of the superintendent, were they not?"

"Yes, Sire; friends who would have given their lives for M. Fouquet."

"They have given them, Monsieur," said the king.

"That is true; but uselessly, by good luck, — which was not their intention."

"How much money had these men fraudulently obtained?"

"Ten millions, perhaps; of which six have been confiscated from their property."

"And is that money in my coffers?" said the king, with a certain air of repugnance.

"It is there, Sire; but this confiscation, while threatening M. Fouquet, has not touched him."

"You conclude, then, M. Colbert —"

"That if M. Fouquet has raised against your Majesty a troop of factious rioters to extricate his friends from punishment, he will raise an army when he shall have to extricate himself from punishment."

The king darted at his confidant one of those looks which resemble the ominous glare of a flash of lightning, one of those looks which illuminate the darkness of the deepest consciences. "I am astonished," said he, "that, thinking such things of M. Fouquet, you did not come to give me your counsels thereupon."

"Counsels upon what, Sire?"

"Tell me, in the first place, clearly and precisely, what you think, M. Colbert."

"Upon what subject, Sire?"

"Upon the conduct of M. Fouquet."

"I think, Sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with attracting all the money to himself, as M. de Mazarin did, and by that means depriving your Majesty of a part of your power, still wishes to attract to himself all the friends of easy life and pleasures, — of what idlers call poetry, and politicians corruption. I think that, by holding the subjects of your Majesty in pay, he trespasses upon the royal prerogative, and cannot, if this continues so, be long in relegating your Majesty among the weak and obscure."

"How would you designate all these projects, M. Colbert?"

"The projects of M. Fouquet, Sire?"

"Yes."

"They are called crimes of high treason."

"And what is done to criminals guilty of high treason?"

"They are arrested, tried, and punished."

"You are quite sure that M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?"

"I can say more, Sire; there is even a beginning of the execution of it."

"Well, then, I return to that which I was saying, M. Colbert."

"And you were saying, Sire —"

"Give me counsel."

"Pardon me, Sire; but, in the first place, I have something to add."

"Speak."

"An evident, palpable, material proof of treason."

"And what is that?"

"I have just learned that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle Isle-en-Mer."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, Sire."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, Sire, what soldiers there are at Belle-Isle?"

"No, upon my word. Do you?"

"I am ignorant likewise, Sire; I should therefore propose to your Majesty to send somebody to Belle-Isle."

"Who?"

"Me, for instance."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Inform myself whether it is true that, after the example of the ancient feudal lords, M. Fouquet is fortifying his walls."

"And with what purpose would he do that?"

"With the purpose of defending himself some day against his king."

"But if it be thus, M. Colbert," said Louis, "we must immediately do as you say; M. Fouquet must be arrested."

"That is impossible."

"I thought I had already told you, Monsieur, that I suppressed that word in my service."

"The service of your Majesty cannot prevent M. Fouquet from being superintendent-general."

"Well?"

"And in consequence of holding that post, he has for him all the parliament, as he has all the army by his largesses, all literature by his favors, and all the nobility by his presents."

"That is to say, then, that I can do nothing against M. Fouquet?"

"Absolutely nothing, — at least at present, Sire."

"You are an unfruitful counsellor, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, Sire, for I will not confine myself to pointing out the peril to your Majesty."

"Come, then, where shall we begin to undermine the Colossus? Let us see;" and his Majesty began to laugh with bitterness.

"He has grown great by money; kill him by money, Sire."

"If I were to deprive him of his charge?"

"A bad means, Sire."

"The good — the good, then?"

"Ruin him, Sire, I tell you."

"But how?"

"Occasions will not be wanting; take advantage of all occasions."

"Point them out to me."

"Here is one, first of all. His royal Highness Monsieur is about to be married; his nuptials must be magnificent. That is a good occasion for your Majesty to demand a million of M. Fouquet. M. Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres down when he need not pay more than five thousand, will easily find that million when your Majesty shall demand it."

"That is all very well; I will demand it," said Louis.

"If your Majesty will sign the order, I will have the money drawn myself;" and Colbert pushed a paper before the king, and handed him a pen.

At that moment the usher opened the door and announced Monsieur the Superintendent. Louis turned pale. Colbert let the pen fall, and drew back from the king, over whom he extended his black wings like a bad angel. The superintendent made his entrance like a true courtier, to whom a single glance was sufficient to make him appreciate a situation. This situation was not very encouraging for Fouquet, whatever might be the consciousness of his strength. The small black eye of Colbert dilated with envy, and the clear eye of Louis XIV. inflamed with anger indicated a pressing danger. Courtiers are, with regard to court rumors, like old soldiers, who distinguish through blasts of wind and the moaning of boughs the sound of the distant tread of an armed troop. They can, after having listened, tell pretty nearly how many men are marching, how many arms resound, how many cannon roll. Fouquet had then only to interrogate the silence which his arrival had produced; he found it big with menacing revelations.

The king allowed him time enough to advance as far as the middle of the chamber. His adolescent modesty constrained him to this momentary forbearance. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

"Sire," said he, "I was impatient to see your Majesty."

"What for?" demanded Louis.

"To announce some good news to you."

Colbert, with a less imposing presence and less geniality of spirit, resembled Fouquet in many points. He had the same penetration, the same knowledge of men; he had, moreover, that great power of self-restraint which gives to hypocrites time to reflect and gather themselves up to take a spring. He guessed that Fouquet was going to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes sparkled.

"What news?" asked the king. Fouquet placed a roll of papers on the table.

"Let your Majesty have the goodness to cast your eyes over this work," said he.

The king slowly unfolded the roll. "Plans?" said he.

"Yes, Sire."

"And what are these plans?"

"A new fortification, Sire."

"Ah!" said the king, "you occupy yourself with tactics and strategy, then, M. Fouquet?"

"I occupy myself with everything that may be useful to the reign of your Majesty," replied Fouquet.

"Beautiful drawings!" said the king, looking at the design.

"Your Majesty comprehends, without doubt," said Fouquet, bending over the paper; "here is the circle of the walls, here are the forts, there the advanced works."

"And what do I see here, Monsieur?"

"The sea."

"The sea all round?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And what is this place of which you show me the plan?"

"Sire, it is Belle-Isle-en-Mer," replied Fouquet, with simplicity.

At this word, at this name, Colbert made so marked a movement that the king turned round to enforce the necessity of reserve. Fouquet did not appear to be the least in the world concerned by the movement of Colbert, nor the king's signal.

"Monsieur," continued Louis, "you have, then, fortified Belle-Isle?"

"Yes, Sire; and I have brought the plan and the accounts to your Majesty," replied Fouquet. "I have expended sixteen hundred thousand livres in this operation."

"For what purpose?" replied Louis, coldly, having taken the initiative from a malicious look of the intendant.

"For an aim very easy to comprehend," replied Fouquet. "Your Majesty was not on good terms with Great Britain."

"Yes; but since the restoration of King Charles II., I have formed an alliance with him."

"That has taken place within a month's time, your Majesty; but it is more than six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun."

"Then they have become useless."

"Sire, fortifications are never useless. I fortified Belle-Isle against Messieurs Monk and Lambert, and all those London citizens who were playing at soldiers. Belle-Isle will be ready fortified against the Dutch, against whom either England or your Majesty cannot fail to make war."

The king was again silent, and looked askance at Colbert. "Belle-Isle, I believe," added Louis, "belongs to you, M. Fouquet?"

"No, Sire."

"To whom, then?"

"To your Majesty."

Colbert was seized with as much terror as if a gulf had opened beneath his feet. Louis started with admiration, either at the genius or at the devotion of Fouquet.

"Explain yourself, Monsieur," said he.

"Nothing more easy, Sire. Belle-Isle is one of my estates; I have fortified it at my own expense. But as nothing in the world can oppose a subject making an humble present to his king, I offer your Majesty the proprietorship of the estate, of which you will leave me the usufruct. Belle-Isle, as a place of war, ought to be occupied by the king. Your Majesty will be able, henceforth, to keep a safe garrison there."

Colbert almost sank down upon the floor. To keep himself from falling, he was obliged to hold by the columns of the wainscoting.

"This is a piece of great skill in the art of war that you have exhibited here, Monsieur," said Louis.

"Sire, the initiative did not come from me," replied Fouquet; "many officers have suggested it to me. The plans themselves have been made by one of the most distinguished engineers."

"His name?"

"M. du Vallon."

"M. du Vallon?" resumed Louis. "I do not know him. It is much to be lamented, M. Colbert," continued he, "that I do not know the names of the men of talent who do honor to my reign." While saying these words he turned towards Colbert. The latter felt himself crushed. The sweat flowed from his brow; not a single word presented itself to his lips; he was in unutterable tortures. "You will recollect that name," added Louis.

Colbert bowed, but was paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace.

Fouquet continued: "The masonries are of Roman mastic; the architects have composed it for me after the best examples of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" asked Louis.

"Oh, Sire, that concerns your Majesty; it did not become me to place cannon in my own house, until your Majesty had told me it was yours."

Louis began to waver, undetermined between the hatred which this so powerful man inspired him with, and the pity he felt for that other man, so cast down, who seemed to him the counterfeit of the former. But the consciousness of his kingly duty prevailed over the feelings of the man, and he stretched out his finger to the paper.

"It must have cost you a great deal of money to carry these plans into execution," said he.

"I believe I had the honor of telling your Majesty the amount?"

"Repeat it, if you please; I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres? You are enormously rich, Monsieur."

"It is your Majesty who is rich, since Belle-Isle is yours."

"Yes, thank you; but however rich I may be, M. Fouquet —" The king stopped.

"Well, Sire?" asked the superintendent.

"I foresee the moment when I shall want money."

"You, Sire? And at what moment, then?"

"To-morrow, for example."

"Will your Majesty do me the honor to explain yourself?"

"My brother is going to marry the Princess of England."

"Well, Sire?"

"Well, I ought to give the young princess a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"That is but just, Sire."

"Then I shall want money."

"No doubt."

"I shall want —" Louis hesitated. The sum that he was going to demand was the same that he had been obliged to refuse Charles II. He turned towards Colbert, that he might give the blow.

"I shall want, to-morrow —" repeated he, looking at Colbert.

"A million," said the latter, bluntly, delighted to take his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back on the intendant to listen to the king. He did not turn round at all, but waited till the king repeated, or rather murmured, "A million."

"Oh, Sire," replied Fouquet, disdainfully, "a million! What will your Majesty do with a million?"

"It appears to me, nevertheless —" said Louis.

"That is not more than is spent at the nuptials of one of the most petty princes of Germany."

"Monsieur!"

"Your Majesty must have two millions at least. The horses alone will run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your Majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening."

"How!" said the king, "sixteen hundred thousand livres?"

"Look, Sire," replied Fouquet, without even turning towards Colbert, "I know that that wants four hundred thousand livres of the two millions. But this Monsieur who is intendant," pointing over his shoulder to Colbert behind him, who if possible became still paler, "has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine."

The king turned round to look at Colbert.

"But —" said the latter.

"Monsieur," continued Fouquet, still speaking indirectly to Colbert, — "Monsieur received, a week ago, sixteen hundred thousand livres; he has paid a hundred thousand livres to the Guards, seventy-five thousand livres to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss, a hundred and thirty thousand for stores, a thousand for arms, ten thousand for incidental expenses. I do not err, then, in reckoning upon nine hundred thousand livres that are left." Then half turning towards Colbert, like a disdainful head of office towards his inferior, "Take care, Monsieur," said he, "that those nine hundred thousand livres be remitted to his Majesty this evening, in gold."

"But," said the king, "that will make two million five hundred thousand livres."

"Sire, the five hundred thousand livres over may serve as pocket-money for his royal Highness. You understand, M. Colbert, this evening, before eight o'clock."

With these words, bowing respectfully to the king, the superintendent made his exit backward, without honoring with a single look the envious man whose head he had just half shaved.

Colbert tore his Flemish point to pieces in his rage, and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet had not passed the door of the cabinet, when an usher, passing by him, called out, "A courier from Bretagne for his Majesty."

"M. d'Herblay was right," murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; "an hour and fifty-five minutes. It was time!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN AT LAST PLACES HIS HAND UPON HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

THE reader guesses beforehand whom the usher named in announcing the messenger from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, — his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully the height of each step, upon which resounded the ring of his bloody spurs. He perceived, in the doorway through which he was passing, the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who an hour before was bringing him ruin and death. D'Artagnan found, in his goodness of heart and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception this man had given him, and bowed also, much more, however, from benevolence and compassion than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: "Fly!" But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously without saving anybody. D'Artagnan, then, contented himself with bowing to Fouquet, and entered.

At this moment the king was fluctuating between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and rapid as

if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, heart-consuming humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him: "Ah, M. Colbert, you have, then, nine hundred thousand livres belonging to the superintendent?" Colbert, choking, bowed, but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan through his eyes and ears at once.

The first word of Louis XIV. to his musketeer, as if he wished it to be in contrast with what he had just been saying, was a kind "Good-day;" his second word was to send away Colbert.

The latter left the king's cabinet livid and tottering, while D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, Sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my coming thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, Monsieur?" asked the king, smiling.

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified. Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its port contains three corsairs, and the side batteries only wait for their cannon."

"I know all that, Monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your Majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your Majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really it, Sire; and I saw a similar one on the

spot." The brow of D'Artagnan became clouded. "Ah! I understand all. Your Majesty has not trusted to me alone, but has sent some other person," said he, in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, Monsieur, in which I have learned what I know, so that I know it?"

"Be it so, Sire," replied the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your Majesty that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times breaking my neck, if you are to salute me with such intelligence on my arrival. Sire, when people are not trusted or are deemed insufficient, they should not be employed;" and D'Artagnan, with a movement quite military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood.

The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph. "Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle belongs to me."

"That is well, that is well, Sire! I ask no more," replied D'Artagnan. "My discharge!"

"What! your discharge?"

"Certainly! I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without gaining it, or rather by gaining it badly. My discharge, Sire!"

"Oh, oh!"

"My discharge, or I shall take it."

"You are angry, Monsieur?"

"I have reason, *mordioux!* I am thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride night and day, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hanged; and another arrives before me! Come, Sire, I am a fool! My discharge, Sire!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Louis, resting his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I have just told you will not at all affect what I promised you. A promise given must be fulfilled;" and the young king, going straight to his table, opened a drawer and took out a folded paper. "Here is your commission of captain of Musketeers; you have won it, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and looked at it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle, but also for your brave intervention at the Place de Grève. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, his self-command being unable to prevent a certain redness mounting up to his eyes, "you know that also, Sire?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment, when it was his object to read a conscience. "You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, Monsieur; you know that I told you, once for all, that you are to be quite frank with me."

"Well, Sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of Musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hanged."

"Is this quite true that you tell me?"

"And why should your Majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I know you well, Monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your Majesty is mistaken, and greatly. Yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword, on account of

the results that action produced; the poor men who were hanged, Sire, were neither your enemies nor mine, and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, M. d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes; you were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Grève."

"No, Sire, no!" said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to appropriate to himself the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordioux!* and as your Majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, Sire, a young man. Oh! your Majesty must accept my compliments; you are as well informed of things out of doors as of things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

"M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d'Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else."

"That is fortunate."

"But he also said much good of that young man."

"And with justice," said the musketeer.

"In short, it appears that this young man is a hero," said Louis, in order to quicken the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

"A hero! Yes, Sire," repeated D'Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king's attention to Raoul.

"Do you know his name?"

"Well, I think —"

"You know him, then?"

"I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, Sire."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the king.

"Well, then, Sire, I have known him ever since his birth."

"Do you affirm that?"

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your Majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he then forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"Certainly, Sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fère, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne is of a valiant race, Sire."

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. de Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer us his alliance?"

"Exactly, Sire."

"And the Comte de la Fère is also a hero, is he not?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king your father, than there are at present days in the happy life of your Majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip in his turn.

"That is well, M. d'Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fère is your friend, you say?"

"For about forty years; yes, Sire. Your Majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Would you be glad to see this young man, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, Sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared.

"Call M. de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of Monsieur the Prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and on seeing D'Artagnan smiled on him with that charming smile which is found only upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his Majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not imply anything against his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked Monsieur the Prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur the Prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the change."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties, and flattering even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with a voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father, — "Sire, it is not from to-day only that I belong to your Majesty."

"Oh! I know," said the king; "you mean your enterprise of the Place de Grève. That day you were truly mine, Monsieur."

"Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the

presence of a man like M. d'Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your Majesty."

"Ah!" said the king, "and what is that circumstance? Tell me, Monsieur."

"This is it, Sire. When I was setting out on my first campaign,— that is to say, to join the army of Monsieur the Prince, — M. le Comte de la Fère came to conduct me as far as St. Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. await, upon the lowest steps of the funereal basilica, a successor, — whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear, upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty, represented by you, — incarnate in you, Sire, — to serve it in word, in thought, and in deed. I swore; and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, Sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your Majesty, and nothing else; and on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison."

Raoul was silent, and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that is well spoken, is it not, your Majesty! A good race! a noble race!"

"Yes," murmured the agitated king, without, however, daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than the contact with a nature eminently noble, — "yes, Monsieur, you say truly; wherever you were, you were the king's. But in changing your garrison, believe me, you will find an advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had wished to say to him; and with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

"Is there anything else, Monsieur, of which you have to inform me?" said the king, when he found himself again alone with D'Artagnan.

"Yes, Sire; and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning."

"What do you tell me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth you terrify me, M. d'Artagnan!"

"Sire, this word was uttered to me by an outrider, who wore crape on his arm."

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not told of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh, do not be angry, Sire!" said D'Artagnan. "Neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel like your servant. The courier from Blois will not be here these two hours; and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I passed him only on the other side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and compressing in those three words all that his memory recalled of that name and all his mingled feelings.

"Eh! yes, Sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, "that the past flies away."

"That is true, Monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future, and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your Majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "and now —"

"You are right, Monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred and ten leagues you have just ridden. Go, Monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers; and when you have rested a little, come and place yourself at my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I always am so."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER VII.

A LOVER AND A MISTRESS.

While the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; while the people of the city were composing his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; while Madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to flee from the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride, — other interests and other prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sound of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had the power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the inner court, — a window which we are already acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of sunlight, — for the sun appeared to care very little for the loss France had just suffered, — a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was consequence of that death, — these two persons were a woman and a young man. The latter personage —

a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes sly, making good use of two immensely large eyes, shaded with long eyelashes — was short of stature and brown of skin; he smiled with an enormous but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility which Nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, approached from time to time very lovingly towards his companion, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety might require. The young girl, — we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun, — the young girl presented a singular mixture of slyness and reflection. She was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious; but let us hasten to say she was more frequently charming than beautiful. The two persons appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion half bantering, half serious.

"Now, M. Malicorne," said the young girl, "does it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably?"

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure," replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we can — "

"Good! there he is, bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you; leave that lawyers' logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility; I am a clerk, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"And I am a lady, M. Malicorne."

"Alas! I know it well, and you overwhelm me by the distance; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, but, no, I don't overwhelm you; say what you have to tell me, — say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste!* there's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, Mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

"Oh, no; I come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry his Majesty's brother."

"Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out."

"Oh!"

"Yes; for really you exasperate me."

"There, there! Patience, Mademoiselle!"

"You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why."

"Tell me, and I will answer you frankly yes, if the thing be true."

"You know that I am anxious to have that commission of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your influence."

"Who, I?" Malicorne cast down his eyes, clasped his hands, and assumed his cunning air. "And what credit can the poor clerk of a public prosecutor have, pray?"

"Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is not in the secrets of Monsieur the
nothing."
lvantage which is confined to lending Mon-
oney."

"In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing?"

"You flatter me."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Since I maintain that I have no influence, and you maintain that I have."

"Well, then, my commission?"

"Well, your commission?"

"Shall I have it, or shall I not?"

"You shall have it."

"Ay, but when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"How! in your pocket?"

"Yes;" and with a smile Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which Montalais seized as a prey, and which she read with avidity.

As Montalais read, her face brightened. "Malicorne," exclaimed she, after having read it, "in truth, you are a good lad."

"What for, Mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not been." She burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

"I do not understand you," said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. "I have declared my sentiments to you," continued Malicorne. "You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have kissed me once without laughing, and that is all I want."

"All?" said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which wounded pride was visible.

"Absolutely all, Mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!" and this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head calmly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; "let us not dispute about that."

"And why not?"

"Because during the year in which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you."

"Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?"

"Because I have been sufficiently impertinent for that."

"Oh, yes, that's true."

"You see plainly that you are forced to avow it," said Malicorne.

"M. Malicorne!"

"Don't let us be angry; if you have retained me, then, it has not been without cause."

"It is not, at least, because I love you," cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even say that, at this moment, I am certain that you execrate me."

"Oh, you have never spoken so truly."

"Well, on my part, I detest you."

"Ah, I will remember that."

"Do! You find me brutal and foolish; on my part I find you with a harsh voice, and your face distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your

robe. But in five minutes you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so!"

"I doubt it."

"And I swear it."

"Coxcomb!"

"And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for; you will give me, presently, something I wish for."

"I shall?"

"Yes, you will. But at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing; so be at ease."

"You are a frightful man, Malicorne; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you take away all my joy."

"Good; there is no time lost, — you will rejoice when I am gone."

"Go, then; and after —"

"So be it; but, in the first place, a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"Keep your good humor; you are ugly when you pout."

"Boor!"

"Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it."

"Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!"

"Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!"

The young man leaned his elbow upon the window-frame. Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, and smoothed down his black doublet. Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" cried she, quite furious; "he has assumed his respectful air, and he will sulk for a week."

"A fortnight, Mademoiselle," said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais raised her little clenched fist. "Monster!" said she; "oh, if I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"I would strangle you."

"Ah! very well, then," said Malicorne; "I believe I begin to desire something."

"And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? — that I should lose my soul from anger!"

Malicorne was twirling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but all at once he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and applied to her lips two other very warm lips for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in the kiss. Nervous and irritated, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

"Good!" said Malicorne, philosophically; "that's enough for six weeks. Adieu, Mademoiselle! Accept my very humble salutation;" and he made three steps towards the door.

"Well! no, you shall not go!" cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. "Stay where you are! I order you!"

"You order me?"

"Yes; am I not mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, without doubt."

"A pretty property, in faith! The soul is silly and the heart hard."

"Beware, Montalais, I know you," said Malicorne; "you are going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well, yes!" said she, hanging round his neck with

childish indolence rather than with loving abandonment, — "well, yes! for I must thank you, at least."

"And for what?"

"For the commission; is it not my whole future?"

"And all mine."

Montalais looked at him. "It is frightful," said she, "that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not."

"I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris, — you are going there, — we are going there."

"And so it is for that motive only you have served me, selfish fellow!"

"What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you."

"Well, in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man."

"Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you;" and so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close that they would have been surprised in each other's arms if Montalais had not violently pushed Malicorne, who backed against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, was immediately heard. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and proffered the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door through which she was coming.

"It is again that good-for-nothing!" cried the old lady. "Always here!"

"Ah, Madame!" replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; "it is eight long days since I was here."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH AT LENGTH THE TRUE HEROINE OF THIS HISTORY APPEARS.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy came up Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She heard the explosion of maternal anger; and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the room trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woful countenance would have softened or set laughing whoever might have observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy. He had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne to his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

"And you, Mademoiselle, — you may be certain that I shall inform Madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor."

"Oh, dear mother!" cried Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "for mercy's sake, spare — "

"Hold your tongue, Mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy subjects. That a virtuous girl like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certainly, a misfortune great enough; but

that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow."

"But, in truth," said Montalais, rebelling again, "I do not know under what pretence you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?"

"And that great good-for-nothing, Mademoiselle," resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, "is he here to do any good, I ask you?"

"He is here for neither good nor harm, Madame; he comes to see me, — that is all."

"That is all very well, all very well!" said the old lady. "Her royal Highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge."

"At all events," replied Montalais, "I do not see why it should be forbidden that M. Malicorne should have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable."

"Honorable intentions with such a face!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

"I thank you, in the name of my face, Madame," said Malicorne.

"Come, my daughter, come!" continued Madame de Saint-Remy; "we will go and inform Madame that at the very moment when she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves and make merry."

"Oh!" exclaimed both the accused, with one voice.

"A maid of honor! a maid of honor!" cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

"Well, that is where you are mistaken, Madame," said Montalais, highly exasperated; "I am no longer a maid of honor, — of Madame's, at least."

"Have you given in your resignation, Mademoiselle?

That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it."

"I do not give in my resignation, Madame; I take another service, — that is all."

"In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe?*" asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

"Please to learn, Madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines;* and that, instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal."

"Ah! a royal court!" said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh, — "a royal court! What think you of that, my daughter?" and she turned round towards Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who, instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliating eyes.

"I did not say a royal court, Madame," replied Montalais, "because Madame Henrietta, of England, who is about to become the wife of his royal Highness Monsieur, is not a queen. I said almost royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king."

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy as did this last sentence of Montalais.

"What do you say of her royal Highness Madame Henrietta?" stammered the old lady.

"I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say."

"As maid of honor!" cried at the same time Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière with delight.

"Yes, Madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady's head dropped as if the blow had been too severe for her; but almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary. "Oh!" said she, "I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great influence upon which they reckoned reduced to smoke."

"Oh, Madame, the influence of my patron is beyond question, and his promises are as good as acts."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful patron?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* no; it is that gentleman there," said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who during all this scene had preserved the most imperturbable coolness and the most comic dignity.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, "Monsieur is your patron! Is the man whose influence is so powerful and whose promises are as good as acts, M. Malicorne?"

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, her sole reply was to draw the commission from her pocket, and show it to the old lady. "Here is the commission," said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate brevet, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to overwhelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used, then, but did not abuse, her triumph. Malicorne was less

generous; he assumed noble attitudes in his arm-chair, and stretched himself out with a familiarity which two hours earlier would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

"Maid of honor to the young Madame!" repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

"Yes, Madame; and through the patronage of M. Malicorne, moreover."

"It is incredible!" repeated the old lady. "Is it not incredible, Louise?" But Louise did not reply; she was depressed, thoughtful, almost afflicted. Passing one hand over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

"Well, but, Monsieur," said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, "how did you manage to obtain this post?"

"I asked for it, Madame."

"Of whom?"

"One of my friends."

"And have you friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their influence?"

"It appears so."

"And may one ask the name of these friends?"

"I did not say I had many friends, Madame; I said I had one friend."

"And that friend is called —"

"Madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, he does not publish his name in that fashion in open day, in order that he may be stolen from him."

"You are right, Monsieur, to be silent as to the name of that friend; for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it."

"At all events," said Montalais, "if the friend does not exist, the commission does; and that cuts short the question."

"Then I conceive," said Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of a cat who is going to scratch, "when I found Monsieur here just now — "

"Well?"

"He brought you your commission."

"Exactly, Madame; you have guessed rightly."

"Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper."

"I think so, Madame."

"And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, Mademoiselle."

"Very wrong, Madame; but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these."

"In that case let us be gone, Louise; we have nothing further to do but to retire. Well!"

"Madame!" said La Vallière, starting, "did you speak?"

"You do not appear to listen, my child."

"No, Madame, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"A thousand things."

"You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?" cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

"And why should I, my dear Aure?" replied the girl, in a voice soft as a flute.

"*Dame!*" resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; "if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed."

"And why should she bear me ill-will, good heavens!"

"It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you."

"Mother! mother!" cried Louise.

"Prettier a hundred times, Madame, — of a better family, no; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will."

"Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?"

"But, Madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there."

"But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court —"

"Ah! so much the worse, Madame!" said Malicorne; "every one for himself in this poor world."

"Malicorne!" said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man: "Engage Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her or making up with her; I must speak to Louise;" and at the same time a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for the obedience which was to follow.

Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame de Saint-Remy; while Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm round her neck: "What is the matter, say? Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?"

"Oh, no!" said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; "on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune."

"Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!"

"Do people never weep but from envy?"

"Oh! yes, I understand. I am going to Paris, and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier —"

"Aure!"

"A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois and who now resides at Paris."

"In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled."

"Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!"

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

"Come, confess!" said Montalais.

"What shall I confess?"

"What makes you weep; people don't weep without a cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"Alas!" sighed Louise.

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"To remain here alone in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the sweet habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you! Oh, how dull I shall be, how quickly I shall die!"

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise breathed another sigh.

"You do not answer me."

"What would you that I should answer you?"

"Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"That is to say you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"Little obstinate thing!" said Montalais; "did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again."

"I cannot confess that."

"Then you are wrong."

"Why?"

"Because — Do you see this commission?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I would have procured for you one like it."

"By whose means?"

"Malicorne's."

"Aure, do you tell the truth? Is that possible?"

"*Dame!* Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he must do for you."

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity to get through with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round: "What is that, Mademoiselle?"

"Come hither, Malicorne!" said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

"A commission like this!" said Montalais.

"How so?"

"A commission like this; that is plain enough."

"But —"

"I want one; I must have one!"

"Oh, you must have one!"

"Yes."

"It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?" said Louise, with her sweet, soft voice.

"*Dame!* if it is for you, Mademoiselle —"

"For me. Yes, M. Malicorne, it would be for me."

"And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time —"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she demands it."

"Well, we will endeavor to obey you, Mademoiselle."

"And you will have her appointed?"

"We will try."

"No evasive reply. Louise de la Vallière shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week."

"How you go on!"

"Within a week, or else —"

"Well! or else —"

"You may take back your commission, M. Malicorne; I will not leave my friend."

"Dear Montalais!"

"Very well, keep your commission; Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be a maid of honor."

"Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"I may then hope to go to Paris?"

"Depend upon it."

"Oh, M. Malicorne, what goodness!" cried Louise, clapping her hands and bounding with joy.

"Little dissembler!" said Montalais, "try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul."

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, ran and kissed her mother. "Madame," said she, "do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?"

"M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise," replied the old lady; "he is all-powerful."

"Would you also like to be maid of honor?" asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. "While I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed;" and upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted, as Tallemant des Réaux would say.

"Humph!" murmured Malicorne, as he descended the stairs, — "humph! there is another thousand livres that I must pay; but I must get through as well as I can. My friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing."

CHAPTER IX.

MALICORNE AND MANICAMP.

THE introduction of these two new personages into this history, and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of the historian and the reader. We will then enter into some details concerning M. Malicorne and M. de Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the commission destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a great sensation at the castle of Blois. At that moment M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular personage was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best-furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had as the companion of his boyhood this Manicamp, a poor gentleman vassal, born of the house of Grammont. M. de Manicamp, by his intelligence, had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated marshal. From his infancy he had, by a calculation much in advance of his age, lent his name and his complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Maréchale, if he had broken a mirror or put out a dog's eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling upon the innocent.

But this system of abnegation was profitable; instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year.

It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the extravagance which banish from man every feeling of the hierarchical world. His sole ambition was to spend money. But in this respect the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year regularly he drained the Comte de Guiche; and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, and declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his energy: he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing, and sold his fine clothes, under the pretence that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. This mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth had rendered our hero quite celebrated in Orleans, a city where generally — why, we should be puzzled to say — he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial debauchees, fops of six hundred livres a year, shared the leavings of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. le Prince de Condé, always needy like a Condé, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest;

that is to say, in those times of easy morals he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred other livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having twenty-four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite in contrast to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition, he spent money from ambition, and he would have ruined himself from ambition.

Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost; and for this, at whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded the highest favors of love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had no friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per annum*, in ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres; Manicamp cost — money lent, never returned — from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per annum:* so that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah, yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong-box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffer of the syndic, half a dozen years, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself — observe, quite to himself — to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household should

be established at the period of his marriage. This period had arrived, and the household was at last about to be established.

A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the influence and on the recommendation of such a friend as the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per annum;* and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a family which the woman's side ennobles, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, might be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous; and in order that the wife should not be on one side while the husband was on the other, — a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts, — Malicorne had conceived the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain that the plan was formed by a clear head; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask the Comte de Guiche for a commission of maid of honor; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this commission of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The moral plan of Malicorne, — for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present,

but extended to the future, — the moral plan of Malicorne, we say, was this: to obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household; while he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp should between them know all the male secrets of the young community. By these means a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired. Malicorne was a vile name, — he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself, — but an estate might be purchased; and Malicorne of some place, or even Malicorne itself, quite short, would sound nobly in the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be found for this name of Malicorne; might it not come from some estate where a bull with fatal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt? It is true, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties; but the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, sly, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had employed the patience of Malicorne a month to establish.

Love aside, Malicorne was happy; but this love which he could not help feeling, he had the strength carefully to conceal, persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean sweetheart, the demon would overthrow him and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear like ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms

she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed that she did not love Malicorne ; while, on the contrary, she did love him. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestations of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him ; and then she believed she detested him. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played at coquetry better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne inseparably was that Malicorne always came cram-full of fresh news brought from the court and the city; that he always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume ; that he never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means Malicorne learned all that passed in the family of the dowager Madame ; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter out of idleness took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in short, was the woof of petty interests and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Paris ; and which was about to bring into the last-named city, where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne, — we speak of the syndic of Orleans, — he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future ; and had no suspicion, as he walked every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Ste.-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII., and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he

who paid for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all that ribbonry, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER X.

MANICAMP AND MALICORNE.

Malicorne left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last piece of decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the commission obtained for Montalais. He had then no expectations of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, all embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left, — as we have been forced to confess to the reader, — Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money; nothing but sleep to take the place of banquets, companies, and balls. It has been said, "He who sleeps, dines;" but it has not been said, He who sleeps, plays; or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing for a week at least, was consequently very sad; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

"Eh! what!" said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, "is that you again, dea friend?"

"Humph! you are very polite! said Malicorne.

"Ay; but, look you, I was expecting money, and instead of the money, I see you come."

"And suppose I brought you some money?"

"Oh, then it is quite another thing! You are very welcome, my dear friend!" and he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for his purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

"And the money?" said Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it."

"What must be done for it?"

"Earn it, *parbleu!*"

"And in what way?"

"Oh, it is hard, I warn you!"

"The devil!"

"You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche."

"I get up!" said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed voluptuously; "oh, no, thank you!"

"You have, then, sold all your clothes?"

"No; I have one suit left, — the handsomest even, — but I expect a purchaser."

"And the hose?"

"Well, if you look, you can see them on that chair."

"Very well; since you have some hose and a doublet left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other, have a horse saddled, and set off."

"Not I."

"And why not?"

"*Morbleu!* don't you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Étampes?"

"No; I thought he was at Paris. You will have then only fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty."

"You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen for them."

"Sell them for what you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor."

"Good! For whom? Is Montalais doubled, then?"

"Vile fellow! It is you who are doubled; you swallow up two fortunes, — mine and that of M. le Comte de Guiche."

"You should say that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours."

"That is true, — honor where it is due; but I return to my commission."

"And you are wrong."

"Prove me that."

"My friend, there will be only twelve maids of honor for Madame; I have already obtained for you what twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ diplomacy."

"Oh, yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend."

"We know what we are about," said Manicamp.

"To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing."

"What? To call yourself Malicorne I.?"

"No; to make you superintendent of my finances. But that is not the question now."

"Unfortunately."

"The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor."

"My friend, if you were to promise me heaven I would not disturb myself at this moment."

Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket. "There are twenty pistoles here," said he.

"And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*"

"Well," said Malicorne, a little angrily, "suppose I were only to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?"

"You are right," replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, "and in that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me."

"One moment. What the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my commission?"

"To be sure you shall."

"Soon?"

"To-day."

"Oh, take care, M. de Manicamp! You undertake much, and I do not ask all that. Thirty leagues in one day is too much, and you would kill yourself."

"I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend."

"You are quite heroic."

"Where are the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," said Malicorne, showing them.

"That is well."

"Yes; but, my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in nothing but post-horses."

"No, no; make yourself easy on that head."

"Pardon me; why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Étampes."

"Fourteen."

"Well, fourteen be it. Fourteen leagues make seven sts, at twenty sous the post, seven livres; seven livres

the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight; as much for bed and supper, — that makes sixty of the livres which this accommodation would cost you."

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, "You are right," said he; "I could not return before to-morrow;" and he took the twenty pistoles.

"Now, then, be off!"

"Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time."

"Time for what?"

"Time to play."

"What do you wish to play with?"

"Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*"

"No; you always win."

"I will wager them, then."

"Against what?"

"Against twenty others."

"And what shall be the object of the wager?"

"This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Étampes?"

"Yes."

"And fourteen leagues back?"

"Yes."

"Consequently twenty-eight leagues."

"Doubtless."

"Well, for these twenty-eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?"

"That is agreed."

"One hour to find the Comte de Guiche."

"Go on."

"And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur."

"Just so."

"Sixteen hours in all."

"You reckon as well as M. Colbert."

"It is now twelve o'clock."

"Half-past."

"Humph! you have a fine watch."

"What were you saying?" said Malicorne, putting his watch back into his fob.

"Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche's letter in —"

"How soon?"

"In eight hours."

"Have you a winged horse?"

"That is my affair. Will you wager?"

"I shall have the count's letter in eight hours?"

"Yes."

"Signed?"

"Yes."

"In hand?"

"In hand."

"Well, be it so; I wager," said Malicorne, curious to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

"Is it agreed?"

"It is."

"Pass me the pen, ink, and paper."

"Here they are."

"Thank you."

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on his left arm, in his best hand traced the following lines: —

'n order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which
e Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight.
DE MANICAMP.

This painful task accomplished, he stretched himself at full length again.

"Well!" asked Malicorne, "what does this mean?"

"That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager."

"How the devil is that?"

"That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper."

"Well?"

"And you set out instead of me."

"Ah!"

"You put your horses to their best speed."

"Good!"

"In six hours you will be at Étampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the count, and I shall have won my wager without having stirred from my bed, — which suits me and you too at the same time, I am very sure."

"Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man."

"I know that."

"I am to start, then, for Étampes?"

"Directly."

"I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?"

"He will give you a similar one for Monsieur."

"I am to go to Paris."

"You will go and find Monsieur with the Comte de Guiche's order."

"Monsieur will approve?"

"Instantly."

"And I shall have my commission?"

"You shall."

"Ah!"

"Well, I hope I behave properly?"

"Admirably."

"Thank you."

"You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, my dear Manicamp?"

"Except making money of him, — everything."

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask —"

"What?"

"Something important."

"What do you call important?"

"Well, suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?"

"I would not render it to him."

"Selfish fellow!"

"Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange."

"Ah! that is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you."

"What! you, Malicorne!"

"Yes; it is I."

"Ah! you are rich, then?"

"I have still fifty pistoles left."

"Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?"

"Here," said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Then speak, my friend; what do you want?"

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. "Write!" said he.

"Dictate!"

"An order for a place in the household of Monsieur."

"Oh!" said Manicamp, laying down the pen, "a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?"

"You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear
."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said five hundred."

"And the five hundred?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the *rouleau* with his eyes; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance. "Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles."

"I say it is for nothing, my friend," said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, "and you will wear out my credit. Dictate!"

Malicorne continued:—

"Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain from Monsieur for my friend Malicorne."

"There you are!" said Manicamp.

"Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?"

"Here are two hundred and fifty of them."

"And the other two hundred and fifty?"

"When I shall be in possession of my place."

Manicamp made a face.

"In that case give me the recommendation back again."

"What for?"

"To add two words to it."

"Two words?"

"Yes; two words only."

"What are they?"

"'In haste.'"

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

"Good!" said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count the pistoles. "There are twenty wanting," said he.

"How so?"

"The twenty I have won."

"In what way?"

"By wagering that you would have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours."

"That 's fair;" and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to take up his gold by handfuls, and pour it down in cascades upon his bed.

"This second place," murmured Malicorne, while drying his paper, "which, at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first, but — "

He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais: —

MADEMOISELLE, — Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long in arriving. I am setting out to get it signed; that will be eighty-six leagues I shall have gone for the love of you.

Then with his cunning smile, resuming his broken soliloquy, "This place," said he, "at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first; but the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion to the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else — or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp!" and he left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COURTYARD OF THE HÔTEL GRAMMONT.

When Malicorne arrived at Étampes, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. He took a two hours' rest, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel which he had frequented in his previous journeys to the capital, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hôtel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time; for the Comte de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Havre, where the *élite* of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hôtel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his tradespeople and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness which were submitted to his inspection, when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed; "let him enter by all means;" and he advanced a few steps towards the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face which he did not recognize instead of the one he

expected, said: "Forgive me, Monsieur the Count, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" said De Guiche, rather coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

"A letter, Monsieur the Count." Malicorne handed him the document, and narrowly watched the count's face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?" Malicorne bowed. "Why does he not come himself?" De Guiche inquired.

"He is confined to his bed."

"The deuce! he has no money, then, I suppose," said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. "But what does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a movement to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself.

"Then why does he not make use of his credit?" continued De Guiche.

"With regard to that, I think —"

"What?"

"That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, Monsieur the Count."

"He will not be at Havre, then?"

Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

"It seems to be impossible, and yet every one will be there."

"I trust, Monsieur the Count, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity."

"He should be at Paris by this time."

"He will take the cross road, to make up for lost time."

"Where is he now?"

"At Orleans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, bowing, "you seem to me a man of very good taste."

Malicorne wore Manicamp's clothes. He bowed in return, saying, "You do me very great honor, Monsieur."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, Monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was a man of great readiness, and immediately understood the situation. Besides, the "de" which De Guiche had prefixed to Malicorne's name raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing. He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur, and said, without hesitation, "Somewhat heavy, Monsieur."

"You see," said De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who is a man of taste, thinks your holsters heavy, — a complaint I had already made." The saddler was full of excuses.

"And what do you think," asked De Guiche, "of this horse, which is a purchase I have just made?"

"To look at him, he seems perfect, Monsieur the Count; but I must mount him before I give you my opinion."

"Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times."

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the curb and snaffle-reins, placed his left hand on the horse's mane, and with his foot in the stirrup raised himself to the saddle. At first he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the courtyard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by.

"Well," said the count, "what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, Monsieur the Count," said Malicorne, "is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking to see whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a war-horse should begin. The fore-hand is light. A horse which holds his head high, it is said, never tires his rider's hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tractable; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the count; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive;" then, turning toward the new arrival again, he continued: "You are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, Monsieur the Count; my clothes were made at Paris."

"There is no doubt of that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes, then, for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, Monsieur the Count."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face, as he answered hurriedly, "A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then; a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already flitting, but to whom the word "affianced," applied by Malicorne to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second appointment destined?" inquired De Guiche; "is it for any one to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced? In that case I pity her, poor girl! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband."

"No, Monsieur the Count; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière."

"Unknown," said De Guiche.

"Unknown? yes, Monsieur," said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

"Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?"

"She belongs to a very good family, and is maid of honor to Madame the Dowager."

"Very well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?"

"Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor."

"Have you your carriage?"

"No; I came here on horseback."

"Dressed as you are?"

"No, Monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and changed my travelling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you."

"True, you have already told me you came from Orleans;" saying which he crumpled Manicamp's letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne, timidly, "I do not think you have read all."

"Not read all, do you say?"

"No; there were two letters in the same envelope."

"Oh! are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Let us look, then," said the count, as he opened the letter again.

"Ah! you are right," he said, opening the paper which he had not yet read.

"I suspected it," he continued; "another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a perfect gulf; he is carrying on a trade in it."

"No, Monsieur the Count; he wishes to make a present of it."

"To whom?"

"To myself, Monsieur."

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. de Mauvaisecorne?"

"Malicorne, Monsieur the Count."

"Forgive me; it is the Latin which bothers me, — that terrible habit of derivations. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise*, — you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne."

"Your kindness affects me much, Monsieur; but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay."

"What is it, Monsieur?"

"That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability; but my name is Malicorne simply."

"You appear to me, Monsieur," exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, "to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M. Malicorne; and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp. Be candid, and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth."

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king's household?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur the Count; but if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me."

"Besides, he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it!—there is a Malicorne at Orleans, who lends money to the prince."

"I think that must be my father, Monsieur."

"Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible devourer of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, Monsieur! I know him. He will fleece you completely."

"The only difference is that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, smiling.

"I was correct in saying that you were a saint, or that you very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you!" said Malicorne, enraptured.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne;" and De Guiche proceeded towards the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him.

At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, thin lips, bright eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows. "Good-day," he said, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

"Ah! is that you, De Wardes? What! and booted, spurred, and whip in hand too?"

"The most befitting costume for a man about to set

off for Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow;" and the new-comer saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince in rank.

"M. Malicorne," said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

"M. de Wardes," said De Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. "By the by, De Wardes," continued De Guiche, "you who are on the watch for this sort of thing, can you tell us what appointments are still vacant at the Court, or rather in the prince's household?"

"In the prince's household," said De Wardes, looking up with an air of consideration; "let me see, — that of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe."

"Oh," exclaimed Malicorne, "there is no question of such a post as that, Monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted."

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and he understood Malicorne immediately. "The fact is," he said, looking at him from head to foot, "a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post."

"All I solicit," said Malicorne, "is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position."

"M. Malicorne, whom you see here," said De Guiche to De Wardes, "is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. But as far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have gentle birth alone to boast of."

"Assuredly," said De Wardes; "but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal Highness's household."

"You are right," said the count; "the etiquette is very

strict with regard to such matters. The deuce! we never thought of that."

"Alas! a sad misfortune for me, Monsieur the Count!" said Malicorne, changing color slightly.

"Yet not without remedy, I hope," returned De Guiche.

"The remedy is found easily enough," exclaimed De Wardes; "you can be created a gentleman, my dear Monsieur. His Eminence the Cardinal Mazarin did nothing else from morning till night."

"Hush, hush, De Wardes!" said the count; "no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it."

"Upon my word, De Guiche, you 're quite a Puritan, as the English say."

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a salon.

"Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner which was peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. "I have come, De Guiche," he said, "to ask your companionship. We set off for Havre, I presume.'

"This is admirable, this is delightful! We shall have a capital journey. M. Malicorne, M. de Bragelonne — ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you." The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their natures seemed, from the very beginning, disposed to

take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, and full of dissimulation ; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. "Decide between us, — between De Wardes and myself, Raoul."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of noble birth."

"Who can be better informed on that subject than a Grammont?"

"No compliments ; it is your opinion I ask."

"At least inform me of the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless as regards the man on whom it is bestowed."

"And you are correct," said Bragelonne, quietly.

"But, Monsieur the Viscount," interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, "I affirm that it is I who am correct."

"What was your opinion, Monsieur?"

"I was saying that everything possible is done in France at the present moment to humiliate men of family."

"And by whom?" asked Raoul.

"By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings."

"Nonsense!" said De Guiche ; "where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?"

"One example will suffice," he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

"State it, then."

"Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the Musketeers, — an appointment more valuable than a peerage, for it gives precedence over all the marshals of France?"

Raoul's color mounted in his face; for he saw the

object De Wardes had in view. "No; who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant a week ago; a proof of which is that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *protégés*."

"Well, the king refused it to Monsieur's *protégé* in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the antechambers during the last thirty years."

"Pardon me if I interrupt you, Monsieur," said Raoul, darting a stern glance at De Wardes; "but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking."

"I unacquainted with M. d'Artagnan? Can you tell me, Monsieur, who does know him?"

"Those who do know him, Monsieur," replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, "are in the habit of saying that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king, — which is not his fault, — he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty. Such is my opinion, Monsieur; and I thank Heaven I have known M. d'Artagnan from my birth."

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME.

THE discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter; for there was in De Bragelonne's look something instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one or the other of them, and perhaps by both. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must take leave of one another; I must pay a visit to Monsieur. Let us fulfil our appointments. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure."

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. "That is well," said De Guiche; "remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased. You will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fère." While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order to perceive what effect the name of Raoul's father would produce upon him.

"I thank you," answered the young man, "the count is very well."

A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes' eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the ominous expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand said, "It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal?" He then signed to De Wardes, who had been engaged in balancing himself, first on one foot, then on the other, to follow him. "We are going," said he; "come, M. Malicorne."

That name made Raoul start; for it seemed to him that he had heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to do so, half dreamingly, yet half irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men went on their way towards the Palais-Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things, — the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them, and therefore he walked behind.

"Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hôtel de Grammont; "you attack M. d'Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul."

"Well," said De Wardes, "what then?"

"What do you mean by 'what then'?"

"Well, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d'Artagnan?"

"But you know very well that M. d'Artagnan was one of those celebrated and redoubtable four men who were called the Musketeers."

"That may be; but I do not perceive why that should prevent me from hating M. d'Artagnan."

"What cause has he given you?"

"Me? personally, none."

"Why hate him, then?"

"Ask my dead father that question."

"Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d'Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any enmity he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, on his side carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they may not be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given."

"Listen to me, my dear De Guiche. This inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan; and when I was quite a child he acquainted me with the reason for it, and it is a particular legacy which he has left me as part of my inheritance."

"And does this hatred concern M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"As for that, M. d'Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred for him must inevitably fall to their lot; and that hatred is of such a nature that whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their portion."

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind. He knew that the time had passed away for home thrusts between gentlemen, but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the heart, instead of being diffused abroad, was none the less hatred; that a smile was sometimes as full of sinister meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their strength, would now succeed the sons, who themselves also would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer encounter their

enemies save by the means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or of treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled.

However, while these gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed entire mastery over himself. "At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not even know him."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of sternness in his tone, "do not forget one circumstance, — that Raoul is my most intimate friend;" a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out De Wardes' secret from him; but doubtless that young gentleman had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul.

In the mean time they had reached the Palais-Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. Monsieur's household awaited his orders to mount their horses, and form part of the escort of the ambassadors to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris.

The brilliant display of horses, arms, and liveries afforded some compensation in those times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said, "Let them sing, provided they pay;" while Louis XIV.'s remark was, "Let them look." Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look, but they could no longer sing.

M. de Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the foot

of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince's apartments, and found him engaged in admiring himself in the glass and putting rouge on his face. In a corner of the room the Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long blond hair curled, with which he was playing after the manner of a woman.

The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: "Ah! is that you, Guiche? Come here, and tell me the truth."

"You know, my Lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth."

"Fancy, Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, how is that?" inquired De Guiche. "That is not customary with Monsieur the Chevalier."

"Well, he pretends," continued the prince, "that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man."

"Do not forget, my Lord," said De Guiche, frowning slightly, "that you required me to speak the truth."

"Certainly," said the prince, almost trembling.

"Well, and I shall tell it you"

"Do not be in a hurry, Guiche!" exclaimed the prince; "you have plenty of time. Look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, here is her portrait; look at it;" and he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution.

De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively. "Upon my honor, my Lord, this is indeed a most lovely face."

"But look at me, Count, look at me!" said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

"It is wonderful," murmured De Guiche.

"Really, one would almost imagine you had never seen this little girl before."

"It is true, my Lord, I have seen her; but it was five years ago, and there is a great difference between a child of twelve years and a young girl of seventeen."

"Well, what is your opinion? Speak out!"

"My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering, my Lord."

"Of that," said the prince, triumphantly, "there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not flattering, what would your opinion be?"

"My Lord, your Highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride."

"Very well; that is your opinion of her, but now of me."

"My opinion, my Lord, is that you are far too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, "My friends are not over-indulgent."

De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and after a few seconds of contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness to Monsieur, saying, "Most decidedly, my Lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your Highness than to look at Madame once again."

Doubtless the chevalier detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed, "Very well; get married yourself."

Monsieur continued rouging himself; and when he had

finished, looked at the portrait again, once more turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. "You are very kind to have come," he said to De Guiche; "I feared you would leave without coming to bid me adieu."

"Your Highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect."

"Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?"

"Your Highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make."

"Very good; what is it?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately became all eyes and ears, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And as De Guiche hesitated, the prince said: "If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am tremendously rich; the superintendent of the finances has sent me fifty thousand pistoles."

"I thank your Highness; but it is not an affair of money."

"What is it, then? Tell me."

"The appointment of a maid of honor."

"*Tudieu!* Guiche, what a patron you have become!" said the prince, disdainfully; "you never speak of anything else now but young misses."

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. "My Lord," said the count, "it is not I who am directly interested in the person of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends."

"Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is interested?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess."

"Why, she is lame," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

"Lame," repeated the prince, "and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes? Most certainly not! It may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

"Chevalier," said De Guiche, "your conduct is ungenerous; while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can."

"Forgive me, Count," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which the count had emphasized his words; "but I had no intention of doing so, and I begin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another."

"There is no doubt of it, Monsieur; and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case."

"Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?" inquired the prince.

"I do, my Lord."

"Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chevalier, "midday already; that is the hour fixed for the departure."

"You dismiss me, Monsieur?" inquired De Guiche.

"Really, Count, you treat me very ill to-day," replied the chevalier, affectionately.

"For heaven's sake, Count, for heaven's sake, Chevalier," said Monsieur, "do not quarrel so! Do you not see how you are distressing me?"

"My signature?" said De Guiche.

"Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give

it to me." De Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. "Here," he said, returning him the appointment; "but I give it on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will make friends with the chevalier."

"Willingly," said De Guiche; and he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

"Adieu, Count!" said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed his slight; "adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not chatter with her own portrait too much."

"Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who accompany you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Both excellent and fearless companions."

"Too fearless," said the chevalier; "endeavor to bring them both back, Count."

"Bad heart, bad heart!" murmured De Guiche; "he scents mischief everywhere, and before any one else;" and taking leave of the prince, he went out. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it trembling with delight. But after having received it, De Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

"Patience, Monsieur!" he said to Malicorne; "the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu!"

"Adieu, Monsieur the Count; a thousand thanks!" said Malicorne.

"Send Manicamp to me. By the way, Monsieur, is it true that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is lame?"

As De Guiche said this, a horse drew up behind him; and on turning round he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which however was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count's voice.

"Why is Louise's name spoken here?" Raoul asked himself; "oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence."

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, "forward!"

At this moment the prince, who had completed his toilet, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of the whole escort; and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and plumes were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT HAVRE.

This brilliant and gay company, animated with such varied feelings, arrived at Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of all this disorder the Comte de Guiche fancied that he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet trimmed with silver. De Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in this violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set fire to rather than illuminated the gate by which Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp's face, could not resist laughing. "Well, my poor Manicamp," he exclaimed, "how violet you look! Are you in mourning?"

"Yes," replied Manicamp, "I am in mourning."

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue and gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this;

and I was even obliged to economize, in order to get possession of it."

"Indeed?"

"It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money."

"At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing."

"By the most horrible roads."

"Where are you lodging?"

"Lodging?"

"Yes."

"I am not lodging anywhere."

De Guiche began to laugh. "Well, where do you intend to lodge?"

"Where you lodge."

"But I don't know where *that* is."

"What do you mean by saying you don't know?"

"Why, how is it likely I should know where I am to stay?"

"Have you not secured a hotel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you or the prince."

"Neither of us has thought of it. Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter —"

"Oh, there are some very excellent houses."

"Well, then —"

"But not for us."

"What do you mean by saying not for us? — for whom, then?"

"For the English, of course."

"For the English?"

"Yes; the houses are all taken."

"By whom?"

"By the Duke of Buckingham."

"I beg your pardon!" said De Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

"Yes, my friend, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace has been preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately secured all the houses fit for habitation which the town possesses."

"Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other."

"Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me."

"But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Havre?"

"He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet landed; but when once landed, he will occupy it."

"Oh! oh!"

"It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything."

"That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house contents himself with that, and does not require two."

"Yes; but two men?"

"Be it so; for two men two houses, or four, or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Havre."

"Yes, and all the hundred are let."

"Impossible!"

"What an obstinate fellow you are! I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which her Majesty the Queen-dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit."

"Well, now, he is an extraordinary man," said De Wardes, caressing his horse's neck.

"Such is the case, however, Monsieur."

"You are quite sure of it, M. de Manicamp?" and as

he put this question he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to sound him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend's state of mind.

Meanwhile the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages blocked up the gate and the square; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be perceived groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle.

Amid all this hesitation, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of De Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected in the water, inhaling with delight the sea-breezes, and listening to the waves which broke noisily upon the pebbles and the sea-weed of the strand, dashing the spray into the air with a roar which echoed in the distance.

"But really," exclaimed De Guiche, "what could have been Buckingham's motive for securing such a supply of lodgings?"

"Yes," demanded De Wardes; "what reason has he?"

"A very excellent one," replied Manicamp.

"You know what it is, then?"

"I fancy I do."

"Tell us, then."

"Bend your head down towards me."

"What! can it not be said except in secrecy?"

"You shall judge of that yourself."

"Very well." De Guiche bent down.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I do not understand you at all."

"Say, rather, you cannot understand me *yet*."

"Explain yourself."

"Very well! it is quite certain, Monsieur the Count, that his royal Highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands."

"What do you mean? The Duke of Buckingham —"

"That name brings ill omen to princes of the house of France."

"And so the duke —"

"Is madly in love with the young Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself."

De Guiche colored. "Thank you, thank you," said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, he added, "For heaven's sake, Manicamp, be careful that this design of Buckingham's does not reach the ears of any Frenchman here; for if so, the sun of this country will shine on swords which do not fear English steel."

"After all," said Manicamp, "I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale."

"No, no," said De Guiche, "it must be the truth;" and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

"Well," said Manicamp, "after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the young princess."

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"It is a fact; or, at least, everybody says so."

"Silence!" said the count.

"But why silence?" said De Wardes; "it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, M. de Bragelonne?"

"To what circumstance do you allude?" inquired Bragelonne, with an abstracted air.

"That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses."

"Pardon me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining?"

"There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris, in order that his Majesty King Louis XIII. should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French Court; and it seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, in his turn, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a princess who has French blood in her veins. It will henceforth confer a title of beauty to have inspired love across the sea."

"Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen as we are, we should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?"

"Ah, Monsieur," said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark, "how am I to understand that?"

"In any way you choose, Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, coldly.

"Bragelonne, Bragelonne!" murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes!" exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong."

"Wrong! in what way, may I ask you?"

"You are wrong, Monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of some one or something" replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

"Be indulgent, Raoul!" said De Guiche, in an undertone.

"Pray do not think of fighting," said Manicamp, "before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much."

"Come, come," said De Guiche, "forward, Messieurs!" and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself through the crowd towards the centre of the square, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway leading to a courtyard was open. De Guiche entered this courtyard; and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appeared to Manicamp somewhat rash, he proposing instead that they should sleep on the matter. This was the wisest thing to do; but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things only were wanting, — namely, a house and beds.

De Guiche considered for a while, and then said aloud, "Let him who loves me, follow me!"

"The attendants also?" inquired a page who had approached the group.

"Every one!" exclaimed the impetuous young man. "Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her royal Highness's residence."

Without in any way divining the count's project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of the still uncomprehended project which these valent young men were pursuing. The wind was blowing briskly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT SEA.

THE following day was somewhat more calm, although the wind still continued to blow. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of reddened clouds, tingeing with its crimson rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signalled; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a sturdy archer; and yet the sea ran so high that their speed took nothing from the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the lines of the ships and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The entire French Court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered with crowds of people. Two hours afterward, the other vessels had overtaken the flag-ship; and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Havre and La Hève. When this manœuvre had been accomplished, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France with twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, shot for shot, from Fort Francis I. Immediately afterward a hundred boats were

launched; they were draped with the richest fabrics, and were destined for the conveyance of the French nobility to the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the strand with a terrible uproar, it was easily seen that not one of those frail boats would be able to make a fourth part of the distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor without being swamped. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor to place itself at the disposal of the English admiral.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceiving the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: "Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men like us ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute force of wind and waves?"

"That is precisely the reflection I was silently making to myself," replied Bragelonne.

"Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?"

"Take care, or you will get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And for no purpose," said De Wardes; "for with the wind dead against you, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels."

"You decline, then?"

"Assuredly I do. I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter with men," he said, glancing at Bragelonne; "but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that."

"And for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent

to the loss of the only good dress which I have left, — since salt water would splash and spoil it."

"You, then, decline also?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly."

"But," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes, — look, Manicamp, look! Yonder the princesses are gazing at us from the poop of the admiral's vessel."

"An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by taking a bath while they are looking on."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"And yours, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go alone."

"Not so," said Raoul, "for I shall accompany you; I thought that was understood."

The fact is, that while Raoul, unimpassioned, had coolly measured the risk to be run, and had seen how imminent the danger was, he was yet willing to accept a peril from which De Wardes had recoiled.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. "Holloa, the boat!" said he; "we want two places;" and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper he threw them from the quay into the boat.

"It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen," said the skipper.

"We are afraid of nothing," answered De Guiche.

"Come along, then!"

The pilot came alongside; and the two young men, one after the other, with equal agility jumped into the boat. "Courage, my men!" said De Guiche. "There are twenty pistoles left in this purse; and as soon as we reach the

admiral's vessel they are yours." The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves.

The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Havre crowded on the jetties, and every look was directed towards the boat. At one moment the frail craft remained suspended upon the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downward towards the bottom of a roaring abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. Nevertheless, at the end of an hour's struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral's vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been despatched to their aid.

Upon the quarter-deck of the flag-ship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which was suspended by stout supports, Madame Henrietta, the queen-dowager, and the young princess — with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them — watched with alarm this slender boat, at one moment carried to the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel with a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, approached to offer their homage to the princesses. Respect, and yet more a certain apprehension for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from look-

ing at the young princess attentively, who however had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, "Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?" Madame Henrietta, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, had smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, "No; it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite." The princess, at this reply, had been obliged to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened.

At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had at last summoned courage to raise his eyes to her, and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her fair face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful brown hair, her expressive lips, and that gesture, so eminently royal, which seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was for a moment so overcome with emotion that had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leaned, he would have tottered. His friend's amazed look and the encouraging gesture of the queen restored De Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, told how he had become the envoy of his royal Highness, and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and the different English noblemen who were grouped around the princesses.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received. The part that the Comte de la Fère had taken in the restoration of King Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the count who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage by reason of which the granddaughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend's interpreter with the young

English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language.

At this moment a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, whose dress and arms were remarkable for their rich magnificence. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, "My ladies, it is now time to go ashore."

The young princess rose from her seat at this invitation, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman had extended to her with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral advanced between them, observing: "A moment, if you please, my Lord Buckingham. It is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; but it is probable the wind may abate towards four o'clock, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening."

"Allow me, my Lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise. "You detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, alas! now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;" and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and De Guiche, whom he saluted.

"I cannot suppose that it enters into the intentions of these gentlemen to expose the lives of the princesses," replied the admiral.

"My Lord, these gentlemen arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for these ladies when the wind will be in their favor."

"These gentlemen are very courageous," said the admiral. "You may have observed that there was on shore

a great number of persons who did not venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to pay their homage with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to-day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies."

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but watching Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous, and seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme.

"In that case," returned Buckingham, "I appeal to Madame herself."

"And I, my Lord," retorted the admiral, "appeal to my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise."

"Yet, sir —" continued Buckingham.

"My Lord, permit me to remind you that I alone command here."

"Are you aware what you are saying, my Lord?" replied Buckingham, haughtily.

"Perfectly so, and I repeat it. I alone command here: all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too."

This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the canopy to prevent himself from falling; his eyes became bloodshot, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

"My Lord," said the queen, "permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the advice of the Duke of Norfolk; even if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and propitious, we could afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however, half concealed beneath the curtains of velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the dispute, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh blow for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French; "and that is doubtless his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man, overhearing this remark, turned suddenly pale, and letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, retired, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of Buckingham's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner was served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness at seeing himself banished by etiquette from the presence of the lady to whom he

owed respect, to a position inferior to that which by his rank he was entitled to occupy. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of inconceivable happiness to pass through his whole frame.

The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my Lord," said he, "from this moment not to interpose between her royal Highness and myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal Highness belongs to France; and when her royal Highness honors me by touching my hand, it is the hand of his royal Highness Monsieur, the brother of the King of France, that she touches."

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked timidity, and at the same time with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, while a groan of despair escaped from Buckingham's lips.

Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a friend or a mother can alone extend, either as a protector or a guardian, over the child or the friend about to stray from the right path.

About two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog which had shrouded the coast disappeared like a veil withdrawn from before it. The smiling hills of France then appeared to the view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TENTS.

The admiral, as has been seen, had determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they left England he had gradually and quietly accustomed himself to it. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt instinctively that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and as she discerned its danger was prepared to meet it whenever the proper moment should arrive. That moment came. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart, and he in his impatience addressed himself to the princess in a low voice: "For heaven's sake, Madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation. Do you not perceive how that foppish Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark. She smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach and languid impertinence with which coquetry so well knows how to give compliance while yet seeming to utter a prohibition, she murmured, "I have already told you, my Lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail, we have already said, escaped Raoul's attention: he had heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he had observed Buckingham draw back, had heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass his hand across his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the final directions for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an exhibition of delight that a stranger would almost have imagined the young man's reason was affected. At the command of the Duke of Norfolk, a large boat or barge, decked with flags and capable of holding twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. This truly royal barge was carpeted with velvet, and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England and with garlands of flowers; for at that time the language of allegory was freely employed even on the occasion of a political alliance.

No sooner was the barge afloat — the rowers, with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess — than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder to take his place in it. But the queen stopped him. "My Lord," she said, "it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land, without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly prepared. I beg your Lordship to be good enough therefore to precede us to Havre, and to make sure that everything is in proper order on our arrival."

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and still more so since it was so unexpected. He stammered, colored violently, but could not reply. He had thought

he might be able to keep near the princess during the passage to the shore, and by this means to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period which fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, "Launch the ship's gig!" The order was executed with that celerity which distinguishes every manœuvre on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him.

The queen-mother rose, and, with a tone of authority, said, "Pray, set off, sir!"

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half choked by contending emotions, said, "And you, Messieurs, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?"

De Guiche bowed and said, "Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her Majesty's orders; whatever may be the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them." Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

"Your Grace will remember," said the queen, "that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England. His presence, then, cannot be dispensed with; besides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such terrible weather."

Buckingham opened his lips as if about to speak; but whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable

escaped them; and turning away, as though he were out of his mind, he leaped from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him and to steady themselves, for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

"Surely my Lord is mad," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am uneasy on my Lord's account," replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was moving towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed upon the admiral's ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or like a mother separated from her child, about to be led away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his gesticulations, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind he sank down on a seat, burying his hands in his hair; while the boat, impelled by the exertions of the heedless sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy that had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him as quartermaster, he would hardly have been able to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up like Achilles in his tent.

The barge bearing the princesses quitted the admiral's vessel at the very moment Buckingham had landed. It was followed by another boat, filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. The whole population of Havre, having hastily embarked in fishing-boats or flat-boats or long Norman pinnaces, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which were returned by the flag-ship and the two other vessels, and the clouds of flame from the belching mouths of the cannon floated in white vapor over the waves, and then disappeared in the azure of the sky.

The princess landed at the steps of the quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied every step she took. While she was passing through the centre of the town, and treading beneath her dainty feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hastened rapidly through the town and towards the place intended for the residence of the princess.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche; "for if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear!" said the count. "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself; while Manicamp is the very personification of gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterward they were in sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of persons assembled in front of the square. "Good!" said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight of the most gorgeous tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, who had been given to the ambassadors for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These improvised tents had been constructed during the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Havre, they completely encircled the Hôtel

de Ville, — that is to say, the abode of the princess. They were joined one to another by silken ropes, guarded by sentinels; so that Buckingham's plans were completely subverted, if those plans had really been to reserve for himself and his Englishmen the approaches to the Hôtel de Ville. The only passage which gave access to the steps of the hotel, and which was not closed by this silken barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened on this entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were always to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Around these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees around a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment when the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived crossing the square, at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily through the crowd of curious lookers-on, and at the sight of these unexpected erections uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a resplendent costume, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hôtel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents the soldier barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, completely infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by two of the officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was inside the Hôtel de Ville,

engaged in attending to the execution of some orders given by De Guiche. At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the doorway of one of the two tents, rose with his usual indifference, and perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. "What is the matter," he said, in a gentle tone of voice, "and who is it making this disturbance?"

It so happened that at the moment he began to speak silence had just been restored, and although his voice was very soft and gentle in its tone, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall, thin figure and the listless countenance of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was moreover dressed very plainly as we have said, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, "Who may you be, Monsieur?"

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in the same tranquil tone, "And you, Monsieur?"

"I am his Grace the Duke of Buckingham. I have hired all the houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, where my business is; and as these houses are let, they belong to me; and as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to prevent my passage."

"But who prevents you from passing, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp.

"Your sentinels."

"Because you wish to pass on horseback, Monsieur, and orders have been given to let only persons pass on foot."

"No one has any right to give orders here, except myself," said Buckingham.

"How so, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp, with his soft voice; "will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?"

"Because, as I have told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square."

"We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it."

"Pardon me, Monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In our country, we say, The highway belongs to the king; therefore this square is his Majesty's; and consequently, as we are the king's ambassadors, the square belongs to us."

"I have already asked you who you are, Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

"My name is Manicamp," replied the young man, in a voice whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Æolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, "When I hired these houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, the square was unoccupied. These barracks obstruct my sight; let them be removed!"

A hoarse and angry murmur passed through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and followed by Raoul arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes arrived from the other. "Pardon me, my Lord," said he; "but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents."

"Moreover, I would beg you to observe, Monsieur,

that the term 'barrack' is objected to," added Manicamp, graciously.

"You were saying, Monsieur —" continued De Guiche.

"I was saying, Monsieur the Count," resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger still perceptible, although in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, "I was saying that it is impossible for these tents to remain where they are."

"Impossible!" exclaimed De Guiche, "and for what reason?"

"Because they annoy me."

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

"You should the less object to them, Monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise."

"Abuse!"

"Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Havre, without considering the members of the French Court who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation."

"The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the spot."

"Not in France, Monsieur."

"Why not in France?"

"Because France is a country where politeness is observed."

"Which means —" exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

"Which means, Monsieur," answered De Guiche, turning pale, "that I have caused these tents to be raised as

habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambasssadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your unreasonableness has left us in the town; and that I and those who are with me shall remain in them, at least until a force more powerful and more authoritative than your own shall dismiss me from them."

"In other words, until we are overruled, as the lawyers say," observed Manicamp, blandly.

"I know an authority, Monsieur, which I trust will be such as you wish for," said Buckingham, placing his hand on the hilt of his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming the minds of all, was about to direct their swords against one another, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham's shoulder. "One word, my Lord!" he said.

"My right, my right, first of all!" exclaimed the fiery young man.

"It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you," said Raoul.

"Very well, Monsieur, but let your remarks be brief."

"One question is all I would ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer."

"Speak! I am listening."

"Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the granddaughter of Henry IV.?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, quite bewildered.

"Have the goodness to answer me," persisted Raoul, calmly.

"Do you mean to ridicule me, Monsieur?" demanded Buckingham.

"Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess."

"You know it perfectly well, Monsieur, I should imagine."

"I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain."

"Proceed, Monsieur; what do you mean to intimate?"

Raoul approached the duke. "Are you aware, my Lord," he said, lowering his voice, "that your extravagances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits with respect to any woman are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force when the lady in question is a princess of royal blood."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, "do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?"

"Be careful, my Lord," replied Bragelonne, coldly, "for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral's ship, you annoyed the queen, and exhausted the admiral's patience. I was observing you, my Lord; and at first I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real character of your madness."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Buckingham.

"One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who has guessed it."

"Are you aware, Monsieur," said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, — "are you aware that you are using language towards me which requires to be checked?"

"Weigh your words well, my Lord!" said Raoul, haughtily. "My nature is not such that its outbursts need checking; while you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true

Frenchmen. I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!"

"Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?"

"I am the son of the Comte de la Fère, my Lord Buckingham, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this —"

Buckingham clenched his hands; but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the movement: "At the very first word beyond the respect and deference due to her royal Highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her — Oh, be patient, M. de Buckingham! I am."

"You?"

"Certainly. So long as her royal Highness remained under the care of her English escort, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you that at the first mark of disrespect which you in your insane attachment may exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow: either to declare in the presence of every one the madness with which you are now affected, and get you ignominiously dismissed to England; or, if you prefer it, to run my dagger through your throat before the whole court. This second alternative seems to me the more convenient, and I think I shall hold to it."

Buckingham had become paler than the profusion of English lace around his neck. "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?"

"Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my Lord, and he will hold quite another language to you."

"But, M. de Bragelonne," murmured the duke, in a voice half choked, and putting his hand to his neck, "do you not see I am dying?"

"If your death were to take place at this moment, my Lord," replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, "I should indeed regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks, not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner."

"You are right, you are right," said the young man, beside himself. "Yes, yes; better to die than to suffer as I do at this moment!" and he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones, and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust the duke's hand aside. "Be careful what you do!" he said. "If you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action; and if you do kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham for a minute gasped for breath; during this interval his lips quivered, his features worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered, as though in delirium. Then suddenly, "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are the worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents!" and he threw his arms round Raoul's neck.

All who were present, astounded at this conduct, — which was such as they could hardly have expected, considering the violence of the one adversary and the determination of the other, — began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham, somewhat against his inclination; but, at all

events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who until that moment had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the mean time arrived the retinue of the princess, who but for Bragelonne would have found two armies in conflict and blood upon the flowers. All was quiet when the head of the procession appeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGHT.

Concord had returned to resume its place amid the tents. English and French rivalled one another in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travellers, and in politeness to one another. The English sent to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to celebrate the arrival of the young princess; the French, in return, invited the English to a supper which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration of a few, she seemed like a goddess. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, to love a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future was opening before them.

After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had somewhat dispersed, and the sound of the music and the cheering of the crowd could be heard no more; when the night had closed in, wrapping with its star-covered mantle the sea, the harbor, the town, and the surrounding country, still excited by the great event of the day, De Guiche returned to his

tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress that Bragelonne kept his eyes fixed on him until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the wall of the tent, and remained thus, with his face buried in his hands and with heaving chest and restless limbs.

"You are suffering?" asked Raoul.

"Cruelly."

"Bodily, I suppose?"

"Yes; bodily."

"This has indeed been a harassing day," continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

"Yes; a night's rest will restore me."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No; I wish to talk to you."

"You shall not speak to me, De Guiche, until you have first answered my questions."

"Proceed then."

"You will be frank with me?"

"As I always am."

"Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?"

"I suspect why."

"Because he is in love with the princess, is it not?"

"One could almost swear it, to see him."

"You are mistaken; it is nothing of the kind."

"It is you who are mistaken, Raoul. I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action, the whole day."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and find subjects for your muse everywhere."

"I can perceive love clearly enough."

"Where it does not exist."

"Nay, where it does exist."

"Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, De Guiche?"

"I am convinced of what I say," said the count.

"Now inform me, Count," asked Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, "what has happened to render you so clear-sighted?"

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "Self-love, I suppose."

"Self-love is a very long word, De Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that generally you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening."

"I am fatigued."

"Listen to me, dear friend! We have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses even, dying from sheer exhaustion or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue which saddens you to-night."

"It is annoyance, then."

"What annoyance?"

"That of this evening."

"The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?"

"Of course. Is it not vexatious for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to see an Englishman wooing our future mistress, the second lady in the kingdom?"

"Yes, you're right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham."

"No; still, he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves? And had it not been for you,

for your admirable prudence, for your singular firmness, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town."

"You observe, however, that he has changed."

"Yes, certainly; but it is that which amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice. What did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!" De Guiche pronounced the last words with so marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble countenance of the young man expressed a displeasure easy to read.

"What I said to him, Count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen to me! I said, 'Monsieur, you are regarding with wistful feelings and with most injurious desire the sister of your prince, — her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be, anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young girl to lead her to her husband.'"

"You spoke to him in that manner?" asked De Guiche, coloring.

"In those very terms. I even added more: 'How would you regard us,' I said, 'if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain sentiments other than those of the purest respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?'"

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, while with the other he covered his eyes and face.

"But," continued Raoul, not interrupted by this demonstration of his friend, "Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound

judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more: 'Learn, my Lord Buckingham, that we gentlemen of France serve our kings by sacrificing for them our passions as well as our fortunes and our lives; and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts which set the heart on fire, we extinguish that flame, even though it be quenched with our blood. Thus we save the honor of three at once,— our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your Grace; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' And that is the way, my dear Guiche," continued Raoul, "in which I addressed the Duke of Buckingham; and he submitted unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly. He seized Raoul's hand with his own feverish one; his cheeks, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke right well," he said, in a voice half choked; "you are indeed a brave friend, Raoul. I thank you. And now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes; I need repose. Many things have unsettled me to-day both in mind and body; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, and withdrew.

The count advanced a step towards his friend, and clasped him warmly in his arms; but in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid; after the tempest the warmth of the sun had restored life, peace, and security everywhere. A few light fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and promised by their appearance

many days of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the large shadows of the tents, intersected by the brilliant moonbeams, formed as it were a huge mosaic on the black and white flagstones. Soon the whole town was wrapped in slumber. A feeble light still glimmered in the princess's apartment, which looked out upon the square; and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to resemble the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of existence, and in whom the flame of life sinks down as sleep steals over the body.

Bragelonne left the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Then, sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, and embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that after a few moments the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche; his eyes, glistening in the obscurity, were fastened ardently upon the princess's drawing-room, which was partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. That soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his whole soul could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts which established between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy, — a bond created by thoughts intensified by so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused dreams of love to descend upon the perfumed couch which the count with the eyes of his soul devoured so eagerly.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square

was open too, — the window of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter window, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the princess's balcony his devotion and the wild longing of his love.

Bragelonne could not resist smiling as, thinking of the princess, he said to himself, "Hers is indeed a heart well besieged;" and then added compassionately, his thoughts reverting to Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too. It is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, and that he has an army to guard that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers; listened to the sonorous breathing of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he had his blue and gold instead of his violet suit, and then turned towards the night breeze which bore to him the distant song of a nightingale; then, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest, thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or six eyes quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham were coveting his own idol in the château at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very safe guardian," said he to himself, as he sighed aloud.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

THE next day the *fêtes* took place, with all the pomp and animation which the resources of the town and the natural disposition of men's minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Havre every preparation for the departure had been made. After the princess had taken leave of the English fleet and for the last time had saluted the country in saluting its flag, she entered her carriage surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would return with the admiral to England; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing the princess to proceed to Paris almost entirely alone. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany the princess, the young duke selected a court of gentlemen and officers to form his own suite; so that it was almost an army which proceeded towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route.

The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its balmy foliage upon their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a Paradise for the new sister of the

king. *Fêtes* and manifestations of delight greeted them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything, — De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the Englishman, and Buckingham in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days were attached. But, alas! the poor duke could perceive that the image of his dear England became from day to day more and more effaced in the princess's mind, in proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgment, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery Yorkshire horses was thrown away; for it was only casually and by the merest accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks roving carelessly around or bestowed elsewhere, to produce from the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper, and address; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees or of rolling in the ditches, over gates and barriers, or down the steep declivities of the hills. The princess, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again turned to her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors.

Then Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy; an unknown, unheard-of burning anguish glided into his veins, and laid siege to his heart. And then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct,

and that he wished to redeem by the humblest submission his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amid the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from the princess as a recompense, and yet this word seemed almost a reproach to him. "That is well, my Lord Buckingham," she said; "now you are reasonable." Or a word from Raoul: "Your Grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul; for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture or a disturbance and perhaps banishment. From the moment of that notable conversation which the two young men had had in front of the tents at Havre, when Raoul had made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham had felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him; and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their common friend, in whose praise Buckingham was almost as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes' presence, who had during the whole journey felt hurt at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche.

De Wardes had that keen and observant penetration which all evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating

the subject with the same reserve which Raoul had practised, instead of regarding with proper respect the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count that ever-sounding chord of juvenile audacity and egotistical pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Mantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attentions to the princesses, who already treated him without any reserve, on account of his pliant nature, his frank courtesy of manner, and his conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes to the count, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

"Madness it would be, I admit, if the princess were really indifferent to your suffering; but she takes so much notice of it that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, your pedagogue, M. de Bragelonne, may denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking Bragelonne!"

"Come, come, a truce to child's play!" replied the count's evil genius, in an undertone; "you know, as well as I do, what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess's glance softens as she speaks to you; you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night."

"True, De Wardes, quite true; but what good is there in your telling me all that?"

"Is it not important to see things clearly?"

"No, no; not when the things I see are enough to drive one mad;" and he turned uneasily in the direction of the princess, as if, while repelling the insinuations of De Wardes, he wished to find confirmation of them in her eyes.

"Stay, stay!" said De Wardes; "look! she calls you; do you understand? Profit by the occasion; the pedagogue is not here."

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," said Raoul, suddenly leaping over the barrier against which, the previous moment, the two friends had been leaning; "the pedagogue is here, and has overheard you."

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul's voice, which he recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul; "you know perfectly well that until our journey is at an end every demonstration of that nature is useless. Sheath your sword, but likewise sheath your tongue. Why do you distil into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness which infects your own? Toward myself you wish to arouse a feeling of hatred in a man of honor, — my father's friend and my own; and as for the count, you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, Monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not with greater justice regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was

not mistaken, I find, in terming you a pedagogue; the tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit flogger, and not of a gentleman. Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, Monsieur!" said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert be untrue?"

"You give me the lie, and do not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, Monsieur, not to kill you until we have delivered the princess to her husband."

"Kill me! Believe me, Monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills. Not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, Monsieur, when a suitable time arrives, I shall avenge his name outraged by you."

"Take care, Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which borders on assassination, and would therefore ill become a gentleman."

"What did you say, my Lord?" said De Wardes, turning towards him.

"I said that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears."

"Very well, Monsieur, if what you say is true," exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, "so much the better; I shall at least find in you one man who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like."

"I understand them in the manner they cannot but be understood," answered Buckingham, with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which even in ordinary conversation gave a tone of defiance to everything he said. "M. de Bragelonne is my friend; you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes cast a look upon Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke's challenge.

"It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted."

"At all events, you insult some one?"

"Yes, I insult M. d'Artagnan," resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this name was the only sting with which he could arouse the anger of Raoul.

"That, then," said Buckingham, "is another matter."

"Precisely so," said De Wardes; "it is the province of M. d'Artagnan's friends to defend him."

"I am entirely of your opinion, Monsieur," replied the Englishman, who had regained all his indifference of manner. "If M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but since M. d'Artagnan is in question—"

"You will of course leave me to deal with the matter," said De Wardes.

"Nay, the very contrary, I draw my sword," said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; "for if M. d'Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine."

De Wardes seemed thunderstruck.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued Buckingham, "is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I

owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours." At the same moment Buckingham drew his sword gracefully, saluted Raoul, and put himself on his guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

"Stay, Messieurs!" said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants; "all this is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost under the eyes of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d'Artagnan, but he is not even acquainted with that gentleman."

"What, Monsieur!" said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, "do you assert that I do not know M. d'Artagnan?"

"Certainly not; you do not know him," replied Raoul, coldly, "and you are even not aware where he is to be found."

"Not know where he is?"

"Doubtless, such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M. d'Artagnan where he is to be found." De Wardes turned pale. "Well, Monsieur," continued Raoul, "I will tell you where M. d'Artagnan is. He is now in Paris; when on duty, he resides at the Louvre; when not so, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d'Artagnan can be easily found at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, you do not show your courage in not seeking him out, so that he may give you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but himself." De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "For shame, M. de Wardes!" continued Raoul, "so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publica-

tion of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that! The king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time; and his Majesty will be right."

"Excuses!" murmured De Wardes, "pretexts!"

"Come now," replied Raoul, "that remark of yours is arrant nonsense, my dear M. de Wardes; you know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels and is ready to fight the eleventh. His name alone is significant enough. So far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Lens, at Bléneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front of the line, while you, by the way, were a hundred paces behind it. It is true that on that occasion there was by far too great a crowd of people for your courage to be observed, and on that account, perhaps, you suppressed it; while here it would be a display, and would excite remark. You wish that others should talk of you, — in what manner you do not care. Very well, do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes, to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword; "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward, and raised his sword threateningly against Raoul, who had scarcely time to put himself in a posture of defence.

"Take care, Monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" cried De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do, immediately on our arrival at Paris: I will conduct you to

M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M. d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received your sword-thrust in due course, my dear M. de Wardes, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the gospel which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see that you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne!"

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed like lightning, and made De Wardes fall back. Buckingham himself was horror-struck, and threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this insult for the last; he clasped his sword convulsively in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, Monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name; but I know too well that the Comte de la Fère is an upright and honorable man to fear for a single moment that there is, as you seem to say, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is merely a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct, Monsieur; you are wanting in courtesy, in reproaching me with a misfortune. No matter; the insult is given, and this time I hold myself insulted. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, Monsieur," replied De Wardes, with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and

now you offer me one from yourself, after I shall have received his."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in matters of fence M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skilful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father, — in other words, not to put an end to your life, but to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright; for you have a wicked heart, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you, Monsieur," said De Wardes; "be assured of it."

"Allow me, Monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne: M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah! I understand," said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, Monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now;" and drawing his sword, he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Buckingham.

"Be easy," said Raoul; "it will not be very long."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity that at the first clashing of the steel it was evident to Buckingham that Raoul would manage his adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the struggle. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil instead of a sword; having retreated a step to gain room, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter within his own and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the

barrier. Then, as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waistband, and hurled him also to the other side of the barrier, trembling and mad with rage.

"We shall meet again," growled De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

"*Pardieu!*" said Raoul, "I have done nothing for the last hour but say the same thing." Then, turning towards Buckingham, he said, "Not a word about this affair, Duke, I entreat you; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it, — forget it."

"Dear viscount," said the duke, pressing within his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, "allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous, — he will kill you."

"My father," replied Raoul, "lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives."

"Your father had good friends, Viscount."

"Yes," sighed Raoul, "such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them."

"Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment when I offer you my friendship;" and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. "In my family," added Buckingham, "you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, that we die to save those we love."

"I know it well, Duke," replied Raoul.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT OF THE PRINCESS.

NOTHING further disturbed the serenity of the journey. Under a pretext which was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose from their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their own weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne, admitting De Guiche into their friendship, sounded, in concert with him, the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of doing. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly; but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who without fear for herself sought occasions of peril. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions which find gratification in an excess of susceptibility, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilets — an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offence — were showered down upon the

three young men with overwhelming force; and from her well-stored arsenal issued glances, compliments, and a thousand other charming little attentions which were intended to strike at long range the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities through which she passed, pages, populace, and servants: it was wholesale slaughter, a universal devastation.

By the time the princess arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers, and brought in her train to Paris half-a-dozen men who were almost mad about her, and two who were quite out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction; and as his heart was already engaged, and thus proof against her arrows, he arrived at the capital cool and distrustful. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the Queen of England respecting the power of fascination which the princess exercised; and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied: "Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or in obscurity; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious, and self-willed."

De Wardes and Manicamp, in their character of heralds, had announced the princess's arrival.

The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, who, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king's military household, had come to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain the princess and her mother had changed their heavy travelling-carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a rich and

elegant chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a canopy of embroidered silk fringed with waving plumes, appeared the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her pearly skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he signified his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders among the group of courtiers, while Buckingham and the Comte de Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the whole procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but a very indifferent attention. But during their progress, as he observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed ardor to the carriage door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, "Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented to your Highness a short time since; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"The princess's knight," added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

"What do you say?" replied the prince, who was still on horseback.

"I said, 'the princess's knight.'"

"Has she a recognized knight, then?"

"One would think you might judge of that for yourself; see how they are laughing and flirting, both of them."

"All three of them."

"What do you mean by all three?"

"Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?"

"Yes, I see. But what does that prove? — that the princess has two admirers instead of one."

"You poison everything, viper!"

"I poison nothing. Ah! your royal Highness's mind is very perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife, and you are not satisfied."

The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the chevalier whenever he found it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. "The princess is pretty," said he, negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"You say 'yes' like a 'no.' She has very beautiful black eyes, I think."

"Yes, but small."

"True, but they are brilliant. She has a good figure."

"Her figure is a little spoiled, Monseigneur."

"I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance."

"Yes, but her face is thin."

"I thought her teeth beautiful."

"They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly I was wrong, my Lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife."

"But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?"

"Certainly, and he thinks so too; for, look, my Lord, he is redoubling his attentions to the princess, to prevent your effacing the impression he has made."

Monsieur made a movement of impatience; but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass over the chevalier's lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. "Why," said he, "should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin?

Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"A great change has taken place in her since then, Prince," said the chevalier; "at the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and somewhat less proud too. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my Lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!"

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He might probably have replied, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. From a distance he had seen the prince and the chevalier, and full of anxious attention he seemed to be trying to guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged.

Whether from treachery or from imprudence, the chevalier did not take the trouble to dissimulate. "Count," said he, "you 're a man of excellent taste."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied De Guiche; "but why do you say that?"

"Well, I appeal to his Highness!"

"No doubt of it," said Monsieur; "and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier."

"Well, that question settled, Count, I resume. You have been in the princess's society, Count, for the last week, have you not?"

"Yes," replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

"Well, then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?"

"Of her personal appearance?" returned De Guiche, amazed.

"Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, — of herself, in fact."

Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated in answering.

"Come, come, De Guiche," resumed the chevalier, laughingly, "tell us your opinion frankly; the prince commands it."

"Yes, yes," said the prince, "be frank."

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

"I am perfectly well aware," returned Monsieur, "that the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?"

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defence which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. "I do not think the princess," he said, "either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking."

"What! my dear count," exclaimed the chevalier, "you, who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait!"

De Guiche colored violently. Very fortunately his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation. "What portrait?" he murmured, joining them again.

The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him. "Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?"

"I do not remember. I have forgotten the portrait; it has quite escaped my recollection."

"And yet it made a very marked impression upon you," said the chevalier.

"That is not unlikely."

"Is she clever, at all events?" inquired the duke.

"I believe so, my Lord."

"Is M. de Buckingham so too?" said the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"My own opinion is that he must be," replied the chevalier, "for he makes the princess laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, — which never is the case with a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton."

"Of course, then, he must be clever," said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to whom he addressed a remark, and so changed the conversation.

The entrance into the city was brilliant and joyous. The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest magnificence. The princess and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., with its naked walls, its sunken floorings, its ceilings covered with cobwebs, the vast but broken marble chimney-places, its cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament had hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. It now contained the richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones and new pictures, with their richly gilded frames; everywhere could be seen candelabras, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; everywhere also were guards of the proudest military bearing with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the antechambers

and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass but lately grew, — as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive that solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the proper accompaniments of a fallen monarchy, — in these immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, paraded cavaliers whose prancing horses drew sparks from the glistening flagstones. Carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who during her widowhood and her exile had sometimes gone without wood for her fire or bread for her table, and whom the meanest attendants of the palace had treated with indifference and contempt.

And so Madame Henrietta returned to the Louvre, her heart swollen with grief and bitter recollections; while her daughter, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, returned to it with triumph and delight. Madame Henrietta knew but too well that the present brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, and that throne second to none in Europe; while the poor reception she had before received was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate.

After the princesses had been installed in their apartments and had rested themselves, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having in like manner recovered from their fatigue, resumed their accustomed habits and occupations.

Bragelonne began by setting off to see his father; but he had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan; but he, being engaged in the organization of a new military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next fell back upon De Guiche;

but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds; he monopolized every embroiderer, jeweller, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and Buckingham a vigorous contest ensued, more or less courteous, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Maréchal de Grammont had only allowed his son sixty thousand livres. So Buckingham laughed and spent his million. De Guiche groaned in despair, and would have torn his hair had it not been for the advice Bragelonne gave him.

"A million!" repeated De Guiche, daily; "I must submit. Why will not the marshal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you will throw it away," said Raoul.

"What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further."

"But what need is there to die?" said Raoul.

"I do not wish to be surpassed in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear count," said Manicamp, "elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult one."

"Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

"A very embarrassing state of things, truly!" said De Wardes. "Spend as much as Buckingham; there is only a difference of nine hundred and forty thousand livres."

"Where am I to find them?"

"Get into debt."

"I am so already."

"A greater reason for getting further."

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this prodigality delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of Grammont nothing but wonders was dreamed of.

While all this was going on, the princess was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already despatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais-Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. "What can this Malicorne want with me?" thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, "Let him wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," said the valet.

"Admit him at once," said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered, brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword by his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: "M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you."

Raoul colored. "From a lady," said he, — "from a lady of Blois?"

"Yes, Monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Thank you, Monsieur; I recollect you now," said Raoul. "And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais desire of me?"

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket which he offered to Raoul.

"My own letters! is it possible?" he said, turning pale; "my letters, and the seals unbroken!"

"*Monsieur, your* letters did not find, at Blois, the per-

son to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois, then?" exclaimed Raoul.

"A week ago."

"Where is she, then?"

"She must be at Paris, Monsieur."

"But how was it known that these letters came from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal," said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. "Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly good," he said; "she is always kind and charming."

"Always, Monsieur."

"Surely she could give me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I could never find her in this immense city.

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. "You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn."

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and the letter contained these words: —

PARIS, PALAIS-ROYAL.

The day of the nuptial benediction.

"What does this mean?" inquired Raoul of Malicorne; "you probably know, Monsieur."

"I do, Monsieur the Viscount."

"For pity's sake, tell me, then."

"Impossible, Monsieur."

"Why so?"

"Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so."

Raoul looked at his strange companion, and remained silent. "At least," he resumed, "tell me whether it is advantageous to me or not."

"That you will see."

"You are very strict in your reservations."

"Will you grant me a favor, Monsieur?" said Malicorne

"In exchange for that which you refuse me?"

"Precisely."

"What is it?"

"I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one. Could you get me admitted?"

"Certainly."

"Do me this kindness, then, I entreat, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Most willingly, Monsieur; come with me."

"I am exceedingly indebted to you, Monsieur," said Malicorne.

"I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp."

"I am, Monsieur; but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me with his sword in his hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket; he would have killed me."

"I can believe it," said Raoul. "I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as an introducer also.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SURPRISE OF MADEMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS.

THE princess was married in the Chapel of the Palais-Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly cast down by grief that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him in pallor and dejection.

"Take care, Count!" said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment when the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Condé was seen attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides at either side of the nave of the church. The count, therefore, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward to the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law's appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon

Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, "Do you not see how much he resembles his father?" and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed very discontented. After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king's permission to present to him, as well as to Madame, the persons belonging to their new household.

"Are you aware, Viscount," inquired the Prince de Condé of Raoul, "whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?"

"I have not the slightest idea, Monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"You affect ignorance, surely."

"In what way, Monseigneur?"

"You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince."

"That may be so, Monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche on his part, never having been questioned, has not communicated any particulars to me."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I saw M. de Manicamp at Havre, and during the journey here, but I was very careful to be as little inquisitive towards him as I had been towards De Guiche; besides, is it likely that M. de Manicamp should know anything of such matters? He is a person of only secondary importance."

"Eh, my dear viscount, do you not know better than that?" said the prince. "Why, it is these persons of secondary importance who on such occasions have all the influence; and the proof is that nearly everything

has been done through Manicamp's presentations to De Guiche and through De Guiche to Monsieur."

"Well, Monseigneur, I was completely ignorant of that," said Raoul; "and what your Highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me."

"I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides, we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! what pretty faces!"

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the room, conducted by Madame de Navailles; and to Manicamp's credit, be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Condé had alleged, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young fair-complexioned girl, who might be twenty or twenty-one years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band, and was the first presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he bowed to his wife, repeated, "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Ah," said the prince, turning to Raoul, "she seems tolerable enough."

"Yes," said Raoul; "she is pretty, but has a somewhat haughty style."

"Bah! we know these airs very well, Viscount; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look,—there indeed is a beauty!"

"Yes," said Raoul, "and one I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles. Monsieur repeated the full name carefully.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance doorway.

"What's the matter?" inquired the prince; "was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a 'Great heavens'?"

"No, Monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that charming blonde who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière!" said Madame de Navailles; and as this name resounded through Raoul's whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his heart to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more. The prince, finding that Raoul remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

"Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul; and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight degree of assurance at the different persons present; and having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment into which her own and her friend's presence there had thrown the poor lover. Her merry and mischievous look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and yet which he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed Raoul on the rack. As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or from some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes

constantly cast down; and intimidated, dazzled, and with heaving breast, she withdrew herself as much as possible, unaffected even by the hints which Montalais gave her with her elbow.

The whole scene was a perfect enigma to Raoul, the key to which the poor viscount would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, — not even Malicorne, who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of gentle birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees had succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, her humble satellite, seemed compelled to gravitate.

As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his left which were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine conversing together. It is true that they were talking in tones so low that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one is engaged in conversation, is a talent which cannot be immediately acquired in perfection by new-comers. A long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seemed like the conversation of a group of statues.

In fact, in the king's and the queen's grand assemblies, while their Majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening with the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this

art, so much a matter of etiquette, so that from the movement of the lips he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Vallière? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the Chevalier de Lorraine, "oh, I know her; she is a good sort of girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Vallière is a charming girl, slightly lame."

"Humph!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes! There are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms upon lame ladies."

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that had passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers, in order to settle matters with them at his earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued, "Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"Well, you, I, or De Guiche, — whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"*Take care,* Messieurs," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious

to put a stop to De Wardes's reply, "take care! Madame is listening to us."

Raoul thrust his hand up to the wrist into his doublet, and left the mark of his nails on his flesh. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he said to himself, "has come here only with an honorable object in view and under honorable protection; but I must learn what that object is, and who it is that protects her;" and imitating Malicorne's manœuvre, he made his way towards the group of the maids of honor. The presentations soon terminated. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the poison which he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the new faces in the court, and suspecting that some hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he went out; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; Buckingham devoted himself to Madame de Chalais and to Madame de Lafayette, whom Madame had already distinguished by her notice and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois and with Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.

Amid these varied political and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention;

but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to enjoy his numerous questions and his surprise. Raoul had gone straight to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had saluted her with the profoundest respect, at which Louise blushed and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, Monsieur the Viscount, here we are, you see."

"I do indeed see you," said Raoul, smiling; "and it is exactly because you are here, that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, M. Malicorne," said Montalais; "really, you are exceedingly indiscreet." Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness became mocking in its expression.

"You would like an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"The situation calls for one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Vallière a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should not she be a maid of honor as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied that he perceived that they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle," replied Raoul, eagerly; "you know very well that such is not my feeling. Were you

called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised; how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance which amazes me is that I should not have learned it until to-day, and that by mere accident."

"That is true," replied Montalais to Louise, with her usual giddiness; "you know nothing about it, and there is no reason why you should. M. de Bragelonne had written four letters to you; but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands. I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul; so that he believed you were still at Blois, while you were here in Paris, and had no idea how high you had risen in rank."

"Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?" exclaimed Louise.

"Why should I? — to give him an opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we had had so much trouble in getting done? Oh, certainly not!"

"Am I so very severe, then?" inquired Raoul.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris; you were away. Louise was weeping her eyes out, — interpret that as you please. I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind. I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, Monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave

these young people together; they have many things to talk about. Give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor which is conferred upon you, M. Malicorne."

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle," said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais, — "forgive me; but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of? — for if protection be extended to you, Mademoiselle, for which, indeed, so many reasons exist," added Raoul, bowing, "I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should be similarly protected."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, innocently, "the matter is very simple, and I do not see why I should not tell it to you myself. M. Malicorne obtained the appointment for me."

Raoul remained for a moment amazed, asking himself if they were trifling with him. He then turned round to interrogate Malicorne; but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière attempted to follow her friend; but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her. "Louise, one word only, I beg."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we are alone; every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us."

"Fear nothing," said the young man, smiling; "we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked."

"But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul."

"Do not be alarmed, Mademoiselle! I am acquainted with the usages of the court. You will not be on duty until to-morrow; a few minutes are at your disposal, which

will enable you to give me the explanation I am about to have the honor to ask of you."

"How serious you are, M. Raoul!" said Louise, uneasily.

"Because the circumstance is a serious one. Are you listening?"

"I am listening; I would only repeat, Monsieur, that we are quite alone."

"You are right," said Raoul; and offering her his hand, he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the square. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: "You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have intrusted all my hopes."

"Yes, M. Raoul," she answered softly; "yes, I know that."

"You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend, and why have you shown a suspicion of me?" Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not answer. "I had thought you loved me," continued Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; "I had thought that you consented to all the plans which we together laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the large walks of Cour-Cheverny and under the avenue of poplar-trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise." He stopped. "Is it possible," he inquired, breathing with difficulty, "that you no longer love me?"

"I did not say so," replied Louise, softly.

"Oh, tell me the truth, I implore you! All my hopes in life are centred in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure becomes corrupt, where all that is young soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, that you may not hear what may be said; shut your eyes, that you may not see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you. Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

"Yes, it was so, then," exclaimed Raoul, enraptured; "that was your reason for coming here. Oh, I love you as I never yet loved you! Thank you, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to secure you from every harm. Louise, a maid of honor in the court of a young princess in these times of freedom of manners and inconstant affections, — a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her. This state of things is not seemly for you; you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes. There is my hand, Louise; will you place your hand within it?"

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me perfectly free."

"Yet —"

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father."

"Oh, M. Raoul, reflect, wait!"

"Wait! it is impossible; reflect, Louise, when you are concerned! it would be insulting to you. Give me your hand, dear Louise. I am my own master. My father will consent, I know. Give me your hand; do not keep me waiting thus! One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that in order to change you forever nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a single look from the king."

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this last word than La Vallière became as pale as death, no doubt from her fear at seeing the young man so roused. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled without adding a syllable, disappeared without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand; he received the promise as a solemn assurance wrung by love from the timidity of innocence.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

Raoul had left the Palais-Royal full of ideas which admitted of no delay in their execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were celebrated with great delight by the courtiers, but to the great despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours arrived at Blois. As he travelled along, he marshalled his most convincing arguments. Fever also is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack of fever.

Athos was in his study, making some additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, shown in by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

"You seem to have come on some matter of great importance," said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, and pointing to a seat.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the young man; "and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention which has never yet been refused me."

"Speak, Raoul!"

"I present the case to you, Monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is in Paris as one of Madame's maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter. I love

Mademoiselle de la Vallière above everything; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be exposed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, Monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to this marriage."

Athos had maintained, during this communication, absolute silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his speech with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing manifest emotion to escape him at every word.

Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness. "You have considered it well?" he inquired.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I believe you have already been made acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice; "but you added that if I insisted —"

"You do insist, then?"

Bragelonne stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in desiring it."

Raoul passed his trembling hand across his forehead to remove the perspiration which had collected there.

Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched with pity for him. He then rose, and said: "It is no matter; my own personal feelings are of no consequence, since yours are concerned. You need my assistance; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, Monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul; I have more

than mere indulgence for you in my heart," replied the count.

Raoul kissed, as devotedly as a lover could have done, the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready, Raoul; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Oh, nothing, Monsieur, nothing! Only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his Majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well thought, Raoul! After or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double ordeal. I will grant your request without delay, Raoul."

The count approached the window, and leaning out called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

"My horses, Grimaud!" continued the count.

"Why this order, Monsieur?" inquired Raoul.

"We shall start in two hours."

"Whither?"

"For Paris."

"Paris, Monsieur! you go to Paris?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Certainly."

"Well, ought we not to go there? Have you forgotten yourself?"

"Yet, Monsieur," said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension, "I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience; and a letter merely —"

"You mistake my position, Raoul. It is not respectful that a simple gentleman such as I am should write to

his sovereign. I wish to speak, and I ought to speak, to his Majesty, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul."

"You overpower me with your kindness, Monsieur."

"How do you think his Majesty is affected?"

"Towards me, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Excellently well disposed."

"Has he told you so?"

"With his own lips."

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of M. d'Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Grève, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king's service. I have reason to believe, then, that, vanity apart, I stand well with his Majesty."

"So much the better."

"But I entreat you, Monsieur," pursued Raoul, "not to maintain towards me this grave and serious manner. Do not make me regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else."

"That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary. You require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew very well that after the expression of his father's wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos leisurely pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul more and more; the love with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father's heart remain void,

and closed to its influence? Bragelonne thereupon, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed: "It is impossible, Monsieur, that you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Vallière; she is so good, so sweet, so pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her worth. In Heaven's name, does any secret enmity or hereditary dislike exist between you and her family?"

"Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily-of-the-valley," said Athos; "observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its drooping leaves."

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, said courageously: "One word of explanation, I beg, Monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man."

"In that case," replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, "prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself to be a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I should have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wished you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse, "I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was."

Athos turned pale; then knitting his brows like the greatest of the heathen deities, "I am waiting to learn the reply you made, Monsieur," he demanded, in an imperious manner.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" murmured the young *man, sinking* at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

"What was your reply, Monsieur?" demanded the count, stamping his foot upon the ground.

"Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately; he who insulted me placed himself on guard; I struck his sword over a palisade, and threw him after it."

"And why did n't you kill him?"

"The king forbids duelling, Monsieur, and at that moment I was an ambassador of the king."

"Very well," said Athos; "but this furnishes a greater reason why I should see his Majesty."

"What do you intend to ask him, Monsieur?"

"For authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me."

"Monsieur, if I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me."

"Did I reproach you, Raoul?"

"Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?"

"I will implore his Majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition."

"Are conditions necessary with me, Monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed."

"On one condition," continued Athos: "that you tell me the name of the man who has spoken thus of — your mother."

"But, Monsieur, what need is there that you should know his name? The offence was directed against myself; and, the permission once obtained from his Majesty, to revenge it is my affair."

"His name, Monsieur?"

"I will not allow you to expose yourself."

"Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say!"

"You insist upon it?"

"I demand it."

"The Vicomte de Wardes."

"Very well," said Athos, tranquilly; "I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, Monsieur!"

CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR BECOMES JEALOUS OF THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

WHILE the Comte de la Fère was proceeding on his way to Paris, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais-Royal was the theatre of a scene which Molière would have called excellent comedy. Four days had elapsed since Monsieur's marriage. Having breakfasted very hurriedly, he passed into his antechamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been over-agreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone; the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only other persons present at the meal, which had lasted three quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal Highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince's face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of others afforded him, and enjoyed at the same time both the ill-humor of Monsieur and the perplexity of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain at table the prince, who was very impatient to move. Monsieur at times repented the ascendency which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those moods; but he dreaded

as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with raging inwardly. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pâté* which the chevalier was attacking; and finally, not venturing to betray his anger, he began a pantomime which Harlequin might have admired. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp rose quickly, napkin in hand. Monsieur ran, rather than walked, towards the antechamber, and finding an usher there, gave him some directions in a low voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding the breakfast-room, he passed through several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was in fact more affectionate, and, so to speak, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathetic attentions which all women like to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have rejoiced to have had a daughter, found in this her favorite son the attentions, solicitude, and caressing manners of a child of twelve. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her beautiful arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics and receipts for compounding essences, in which she was very particular; and then, too, he kissed her hands and eyes in the most endearing and childlike manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to recommend.

Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son: Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by divine right. With the king her character was that of the queen-mother; with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that of all places of refuge a mother's heart is the most compassionate and the surest. When quite a child, he had always fled there for refuge when storms arose between him and his brother; often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses upon a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire, — Philip, the conqueror, but terrified at his victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of a forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceful intervention, had succeeded in arranging the differences between her sons, and in sharing at the same time all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly upon his brother, felt disposed to show towards his mother more submission and attachment than his character really possessed.

Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household; and she was already preparing all her batteries to rule with the same absolute authority over the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartments with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, comprehending that assistance was required either by the weakest or by the most rebellious. She was

writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper, and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's arms, and sat down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary respect was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who of his own accord observed towards her a respect of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed with regard to such principles of respect, there must surely be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A great many things," murmured the prince, dolefully.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one which occupies it more than others."

"Yes, Madame; one indeed has occupied me more than any other."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

Philip opened his mouth as if to give vent to all the troubles which were passing in his mind, and which seemed only waiting for a point of issue to burst forth. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart contained.

"Come, Philip, show a little firmness," said the queen-mother. "When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?"

"I do not say no, Madame."

"Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take *courage*!"

"In fact, Madame, what I may have to say must be kept a perfect secret; for when a lady is in the case —"

"Ah! you wish to speak of Madame, then?" inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

"Yes."

"Well, then, if it is Madame you wish to speak of, my son, do not hesitate. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, be assured that I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all that you may have to say about her."

"Pray tell me, Madame, in your turn, whether you have not noticed something?"

"Something, Philip? Your words have an alarming vagueness. What do you mean by something?"

"Madame is pretty, certainly."

"No doubt of it."

"Yet not altogether beautiful."

"No; but as she matures she may still become very strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was myself very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty."

"And consequently others may have remarked it."

"Undoubtedly; for a woman of ordinary rank is observed, and with still greater reason a princess."

"She has been well brought up, I suppose, Madame?"

"Madame Henrietta, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in her manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The education of the young princess may have been neglected, but her principles I believe to be good. Such, at least, was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned

to England, and I am ignorant of what may have occurred there."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that there are some heads, naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity."

"That is the very word, Madame. I think the princess rather giddy."

"We must not exaggerate, Philip. She is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect is, in persons of high rank and position, a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry usually forms a brilliant court around her; her smile stimulates luxury, and arouses wit and courage even; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful."

"Thank you extremely, Madame," said Philip, with some temper; "you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me, my mother."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

"You know, Madame," said Philip, dolefully, "whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married."

"Now, indeed, you alarm me; you have some serious cause of complaint against Madame?"

"I do not precisely say it is serious."

"In that case, then, throw aside your present mournful looks. If you show yourself in your palace in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband."

"The fact is," replied Philip, "I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall be glad to have others know it."

"For shame, Philip!"

"Upon my word, Madame, I will tell you frankly that *I do not* understand the life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for one reason or another. In the mornings there are visits, correspondence, and toilets; in the evenings, balls and concerts."

"You are jealous, Philip."

"I! Heaven forbid! Let others act the part of a jealous husband, — not I. But I am annoyed."

"Philip, all those things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent; and so long as you have nothing of greater importance — "

"Yet listen! Without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness; certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous."

"Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty too. You speak of frequent visits and certain preferences, — very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the real question."

"Well, yes — "

"This is more serious than I thought. Is it possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?"

"Precisely so."

"What! your wife, married only four days ago, prefer some other person to yourself? Take care, Philip! You exaggerate your grievances; wishing to prove, proves nothing."

The prince, bewildered by his mother's serious manner, wished to reply, but could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

"You draw back, then?" said Anne of Austria. "I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgment of your mistake."

"No," exclaimed Philip, "I do not draw back, and I will prove all that I asserted. I spoke of preferences and of visits, did I not? Well, listen!"

Anne of Austria prepared to listen with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always finds in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

"Well," said Philip, "tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why does my wife retain an English court about her?" and Philip crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

"For a very simple reason," returned Anne of Austria; "because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would be hardly polite — not good policy, certainly — to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or from any sacrifice."

"A wonderful sacrifice, indeed, my mother, to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for one crown than can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with!"

"In love, Philip! Think what you are saying! Who
ove with Madame?"
ie handsome Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you
fend him as well?"
ne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time.
" of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain

recollections to her of a tender and melancholy nature. "The Duke of Buckingham!" she murmured.

"Yes; one of those feather-bed soldiers, as my grandfather Henry IV. called them."

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"This is too bad! my own mother takes the part of my wife's lover against me!" exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

"Philip, my son," exclaimed Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you! Your wife has no lover; and had she one, it would not be the Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the laws of hospitality are sacred with them."

"Eh, Madame!" cried Philip; "the Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, and do the English so very religiously respect what belongs to the princes of France?"

Anne blushed to her temples a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but really to conceal her blushes from the eyes of her son. "Really, Philip," she said, "you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me. Reflect a little!"

"There is no need of reflection, Madame, for I see with my own eyes."

"Well, and what do you see?"

"I see that the Duke of Buckingham never leaves my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she dares to accept them. Yesterday she spoke of *sachets à la violette;* well, our French perfumers, — you know very well, Madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success, — our French perfumers, I say, have

never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet à la violette;* and I am sure that the one my wife has, came from him."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "you build your pyramids upon needle-points. Be careful! What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his countrywoman a receipt for a new essence? These strange ideas, I protest, painfully recall to me your father, who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son," said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how rudely he touched his mother's heart.

The queen turned pale, and pressed her hand nervously upon her bosom; but recovering herself immediately, she said, "You came here with a purpose of some kind, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"What was it?"

"I came, Madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to anything from the Duke of Buckingham."

"What do you intend to do, then?"

"I shall complain to the king."

"And what do you expect the king to reply?"

"Very well, then," said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness; "very well, I will right myself!"

"What do you call righting yourself?" inquired Anne of Austria, somewhat alarmed.

"I will have the Duke of Buckingham leave the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him."

"You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip," said the queen; "for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you."

"Do you threaten me, Madame?" exclaimed Philip, in tears; "do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints?"

"I do not threaten you; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain that to adopt towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure, — to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to hurry France and England into the saddest variances. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the King of France, does not know how to hide an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither actual nor possible, and we are considering merely a matter of absurd jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"Whatever you may know, I exhort you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, Madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy, ceremonious manner. "Then explain what you really require, Monsieur," said she.

"I do not require anything, Madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not of his own accord keep away from my apartments, I shall forbid him an entrance."

"That is a question we will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, Madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since

I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that conversation which I forbid, Monsieur," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so: I shall not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh," said Anne of Austria, with a melancholy arising from her recollections, "never tyrannize over a wife, my son, — never behave too imperiously towards yours! A woman conquered is not always convinced."

"What is to be done, then? I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your hypocritical advisers, — the Chevalier de Lorraine, your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me, Philip. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, Madame."

"Send the duke to me, then. Smile upon him. Say nothing to your wife, the king, to any one. Follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what a household is which is troubled by advisers."

"You shall be obeyed, Madame."

"And you will be satisfied at the result, Philip. Send the duke to me."

"That will not be difficult."

"Where do you suppose him to be?"

"*Pardieu!* at my wife's door, whose *levée* he is probably awaiting. That is beyond doubt."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be good enough to tell the duke that I beg him to come and see me."

Philip kissed his mother's hand, and set off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOREVER!

THE Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen-mother's invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d'Orléans. When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbows resting on a table and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she was as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham's father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate one, who lived but for her alone, and who died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender that it expressed at the same time the kindness of a maternal affection and a certain something like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

"Your Majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to speak to me."

"Yes, Duke," said the queen, in English; "will you be good enough to sit down?"

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him.

After having abandoned the first few moments to the irrepressible emotion she experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. "What do you think of France, Monsieur?" she said, in French.

"It is a lovely country, Madame," replied the duke.

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"Once only, Madame."

"But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?"

"I prefer my own native land to France," replied the duke; "but if your Majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Paris, I should prefer as a residence, I should reply, Paris."

Anne of Austria observed the ardent tone in which these words were pronounced. "I am told, my Lord, that you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored palace."

"It was my father's residence," replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

"Doubtless it possesses great advantages and precious remembrances," replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections which were of a very enduring character.

"In fact," said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, "sensitive persons live as much in the past or in the future as in the present."

"That is very true," said the queen, in a low voice. "It follows, then, my Lord," she added, "that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the *past.*"

Buckingham raised his head and said, "I think not, Madame."

"What do you mean?"

"On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France."

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to exhibit surprise. "Why?" she said. "Are you not in favor with the new king?"

"Perfectly so, Madame, for his Majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"It cannot be because your fortune has diminished," said the queen, "for it is said to be considerable."

"My fortune, Madame, has never been more thriving."

"There is some secret cause, then?"

"No, Madame," said Buckingham, eagerly, "there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I like living in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like those amusements, a trifle serious, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France."

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. "Amusements of a serious nature?" she said. "Has your Grace well considered their seriousness?" The duke hesitated. "There is no amusement so serious," continued the queen, "as should prevent a man of your rank —"

"Your Majesty seems to insist greatly upon that point," interrupted the duke.

"Do you think so, my Lord?"

"If your Majesty will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the charm of living in France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said: "Believe me, Monsieur, nothing can

equal the charm of a residence in one's own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to long for Spain. I have lived long, my Lord, very long for a woman; and I confess to you that not a year has passed in which I have not longed for Spain."

"Not one year, Madame?" said the young duke, coldly. "Not one of those years when you reigned queen of beauty, — as you still are, indeed?"

"A truce to flattery, Duke, for I am old enough to be your mother." She emphasized these latter words in a manner and with a gentleness which penetrated Buckingham's heart. "Yes," she said, "I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason I will give you a word of advice."

"That advice being that I should return to London?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my Lord."

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections.

"It must be so," added the queen.

"What!" he again exclaimed, "am I seriously told that I *must* leave, that I must exile myself, that I am to flee at once?"

"Exile yourself, did you say? Why, my Lord, one would fancy that France was your native country."

"Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love."

"Not another word, my Lord; you forget whom you are addressing."

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. "Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are not only the first person in this kingdom

by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, Madame. Have I, indeed, said anything to which you should reply in words so cruel? Can I have betrayed myself?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said the queen, in a low voice.

"I have said nothing, — I know nothing."

"You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides — "

"Besides," interrupted the duke, eagerly, "no one knows that you are listening to me."

"On the contrary, it is known, Duke, that you have the defects and the virtues of youth."

"I have been betrayed or denounced, then?"

"By whom?"

"By those who at Havre had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book."

"I do not know whom you mean."

"M. de Bragelonne, for instance."

"I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. No, M. de Bragelonne has said nothing."

"Who can it be, then? If any one, Madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold — "

"What would you do, Duke?"

"There are secrets which kill those who discover them."

"He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives; and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides, — he is a husband, a jealous man, — he is the second gentleman in France, — he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke turned pale as death. "How cruel you are, Madame!" said he.

"You see, Buckingham," said Anne of Austria, sadly, "how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself."

"If we fight, Madame, we die on the field of battle," replied the young man gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression.

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. "Villiers," she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, "what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son, — a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not think of it. What! in order to spare your tears, am I to commit these two crimes, Villiers? You speak of the dead: the dead, at least, were respectful and submissive; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus disguised, was like a gift or a favor conferred upon them."

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. "You are right, Madame," he said; "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away, — they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at."

"No," murmured Anne of Austria, "they were not forgotten! But who says that you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one's behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness, — grant me this favor; let me for this, also, be indebted to one of your name."

"It is for your sake, then, Madame?"

"For mine alone."

"There will be no one left behind me who will venture to mock,—no prince, even, who shall say, 'I required it'?"

"Listen to me, Duke!" and hereupon the august features of the aged queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, Duke, as I rely upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, Madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate it may be, can afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother, Duke?" replied the queen, with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, Madame; yet I remember how that noble lady used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept."

"Villiers," murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man's neck, "look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep."

"I thank you, Madame," said the young man, affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; "I feel that there is indeed still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love."

The queen-mother gazed at him and pressed his hand. "Go!" she said.

"When must I leave? Command me."

"Any time that may suit you, my Lord," resumed the queen; "you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have

expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening; but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave."

"My wish?" murmured the young man.

"Yes, Duke."

"And — shall I never return to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. "It would be a consolation for me," she said, "if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at St. Denis, beside the king my husband."

"Madame, you are goodness itself. The tide of prosperity is setting in upon you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you."

"In that case you will not come for some time, then," said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

"I shall not return," said Buckingham, sadly, "young as I am. Death, Madame, does not reckon by years, — it is impartial; some die young, others live on to old age."

"Away with gloomy ideas, Duke! Let me comfort you. Return in two years. I read in your charming face that the very ideas which sadden you so much now will have disappeared before six months shall have passed, and will be all dead and forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned to you."

"I think you judged me better a little while since, Madame," replied the young man, "when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham."

"Silence!" said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection which she could not restrain. "Go, go! spare me, and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen. You are the subject of the King of England; King Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers, — farewell!"

"Forever!" replied the young man; and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotion.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then, looking at herself in the glass, murmured, "It has been truly said that a woman is always young, and that the age of twenty years always lies concealed in some secret corner of the heart."

CHAPTER XXIII.

KING LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT THINK MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A GENTLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

Raoul and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had had the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His Majesty had passed a portion of the day in looking over, with Madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards; and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, had passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet.

Raoul was in the antechamber when the two ministers went out, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What does M. de Bragelonne want?"

The young man approached. "An audience, Sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fère, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your Majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and my supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fère ready?"

"He is below, and awaits your Majesty's commands."

"Let him come at once," said the king; and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those men who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. "Let me hope, Count," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your Majesty," replied the count, "that I have indeed come for that purpose."

"That is well, then," said the king, joyously.

"It is not for myself, Sire."

"So much the worse; but at least I will do for your *protégé* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."

"Your Majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, Count."

"Not altogether so, Sire. That which I am desirous of obtaining from your Majesty I cannot obtain for myself. The viscount thinks of marrying."

"He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man. I will choose a wife for him."

"He has already chosen one, Sire, and only awaits your Majesty's consent."

"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chosen a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own views?"

Athos hesitated for a moment. "His betrothed is of good birth, but has no fortune."

"That is a misfortune which we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, Sire; but your Majesty will permit me to offer a remark?"

"Do so, Count."

"Your Majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage portion to this young girl?"

"Certainly."

"I should regret, Sire, if the application I make your Majesty should have that result."

"No false delicacy, Count; what is the bride's name?"

"Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Athos, coldly.

"Ah!" said the king, searching his memory, "I know that name; there was a Marquis de la Vallière."

"Yes, Sire, it is his daughter."

"But he died, and his widow was married again to M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame's household."

"Your Majesty is correctly informed."

"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honor."

"Your Majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the count's anxious countenance, said: "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, Count."

"I am not quite sure," replied Athos.

"I have seen her, but she did not strike me as being so."

"She seems to be a sweet and modest girl, but has little beauty, Sire."

"Beautiful fair hair, however?"

"I think so."

"And quite beautiful blue eyes?"

"Yes, Sire."

"With regard to beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question."

"From fifteen to twenty thousand livres' dowry at the

very outside, Sire. But the lovers are disinterested enough ; for myself, I care little for money."

"For superfluity, you mean ; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand livres, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency ; I will do it for Bragelonne."

The king again noticed the coldness with which Athos received his remark.

"Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank," said Louis XIV. "The daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough ; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the family, — on the women's side, I know, but damaging all the same, — and you, Count, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family."

"Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your Majesty."

The king again paused. "A moment, Count. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of our conversation. You come to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, Count, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am ; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success."

"Well, Sire, that is true."

"I do not understand you, then ; refuse."

"Nay, Sire : I love Bragelonne with my whole heart ; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future ; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is

objectionable to me, but I implore your Majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy."

"Tell me, Count, is she in love with him?"

"If your Majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's affection. She is young, she is a child, she is intoxicated with joy; the delight of being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may have in her heart. It is a marriage similar to many others which your Majesty has seen at court; but Bragelonne wishes it, and let it be so."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who make slaves of themselves for their children," said the king.

"Sire, I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering, and is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become heavy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your Majesty of the services he may be able to render."

"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, Count."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the count, "to tell your Majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."

"And I too, as much as yourself, Count, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."

"I only await your Majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before you to receive your consent."

"You are mistaken, Count," said the king, firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure the viscount's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, Sire," exclaimed Athos, "your Majesty has promised!"

"Not so, Count; I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."

"I appreciate all your Majesty's considerate and generous intentions in my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach your Majesty as an ambassador."

"An ambassador, Count, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."

"But, Sire, it will be such a blow for Bragelonne."

"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the viscount."

"Love, Sire, is overwhelming in its might."

"Love can be resisted, Count; I myself can assure you of that."

"When one has the soul of a king, — your soul, Sire."

"Do not make yourself uneasy upon the subject. I have certain views for Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young. I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves my favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, Count, I wish them to wait."

"Yet once more, Sire."

"Monsieur the Count, you told me you came to request a favor."

"Assuredly, Sire."

"Grant me one, then, instead, — let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that before long war may be declared; I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man or a father of a family; I should hesitate, also, on Bragelonne's account, to endow with a fortune, without

some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy among my nobility."

Athos bowed, and remained silent.

"Is that all you had to ask me?" added Louis XIV.

"Absolutely all, Sire; and I take my leave of your Majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?"

"Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the viscount that at my *levée* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, Count, to join my card-table."

"I am in travelling-costume, Sire."

"A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, Count, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to all men of your merit."

"Provided, Sire, a monarch reigns truly great in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple."

With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found Bragelonne, who awaited his return.

"Well, Monsieur?" said the young man.

"The king, Raoul, is well disposed towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed towards our house."

"You have bad news to communicate to me, Monsieur," said the young man, turning very pale.

"The king will himself inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"The king has not signed, however?"

"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, Raoul, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for it. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience than on the king's good-will."

Raoul, in utter consternation, because he knew the count's frankness as well as his tact, remained plunged in a dull, heavy stupor.

"Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I will follow you," Raoul stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan?"

"Shall I show you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.

"Do so."

"It is on the other staircase, then."

They altered their course; but as they reached the landing of the grand gallery, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, Monsieur. Monsieur the Count heard of your return, and wrote to you without delay. I have been seeking you for the last hour."

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, Monsieur."

"Certainly."

DEAR RAOUL, — I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention. I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible.

DE GUICHE.

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his Grace the duke."

"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I will leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I excuse you. Adieu, Raoul! You will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, Monsieur."

When Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

MONSIEUR DE BRAGELONNE, — You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased. I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be obliging enough to come and see me, for I am told you have arrived from Blois?

Your devoted

VILLIERS, *Duke of Buckingham.*

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SWORD-THRUSTS IN THE WATER.

RAOUL, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger. It might have been imagined that nothing at all had passed between them; they only behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him; and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two young companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable, and Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress.

De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him sit down, saying, "How well you look!"

"That is rather strange," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."

"Your case is the same as mine, then, Raoul, — your love-affair is not going well."

"So much the better, Count, so far as you are concerned; the worst news, that which would distress me most of all, would be good news."

"In that case do not distress yourself; for not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see people about me who are happy."

"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul; "explain yourself, my friend."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling which you saw dawn in me, increase in me, and take such entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and all my own strength to my aid. I have well considered the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked. I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am well aware. But it matters little; I shall pursue my own course."

"Madman! you cannot advance another step without inviting ruin to-day, death to-morrow."

"Come what may!"

"De Guiche!"

"I have done with reflections; listen!"

"And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?"

"Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man, and accompanies him even to the grave."

"But, admitting that you obtain the happiness which you covet, even then you are more certainly lost than if you had not obtained it."

"I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more. You could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand that I do not wish to be convinced. I have gone so far that I cannot recede; I have suffered so much that death itself would be a boon. I now not only love to madness, Raoul, I am also in a perfect rage of jealousy."

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression not unlike anger. "Well?" said he.

"Well or ill, it matters little. This is what I claim

from you, my friend, my brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gayety. On the first day I dared not look at her; I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear to lose sight of her, and she, Raoul, — at least I thought I noticed it, — she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine a shadow intervened; another's smile invited her smile. Beside her horse another always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear a caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for three days past my brain has been on fire; fire courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away; that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced!"

"You wish Monsieur's death?" exclaimed Raoul.

"No, no! I am not jealous of Monsieur; I am not jealous of the husband, I am jealous of the lover."

"Of the lover?" said Raoul.

"Have you not observed it, — you, who were formerly so keen-sighted?"

"Are you jealous of M. de Buckingham?"

"To the very death!"

"Again jealous?"

"This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter."

"It was you, then, who wrote to him!"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it because he told me so. Look at this!" and he handed to De Guiche the letter which he had received nearly at the same moment as his own.

De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, "He is a brave man; and more than that, a gallant man."

"Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in as good a style."

"He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf."

"But that is almost out of the question."

"What is?"

"That I should call on him for that purpose."

"Why so?"

"The duke consults me as you do."

"Oh! But you will give me the preference, I suppose. Now listen! here is what I beg you to tell his Grace, — it is a very simple matter, — to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I wish to meet him at Vincennes."

"Reflect, De Guiche!"

"I thought I had already said that I had reflected."

"The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders him inviolable — Vincennes is close to the Bastille."

"The consequences concern me."

"But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?"

"Never fear! He will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him; he must hate me as I hate him. I implore you, therefore, to seek the duke; and if it is necessary to entreat him to accept my proposition, I will do that."

"That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now at play with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient."

"Very well. I shall take De Wardes to keep me in countenance."

"Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can rejoin us at any time; we can leave him here."

"Yes, that is true."

"He knows nothing?"

"Positively nothing. You continue still on cool terms, then?"

"Has he not told you anything?"

"No."

"I do not like the man; and as I never liked him, the result is that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday."

"Let us go, then."

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais-Royal. As they went along, Raoul was engaged in framing some scheme. The sole depositary of two secrets, he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendency he had acquired over De Guiche; and affairs did not look utterly desperate to him.

On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their atmosphere of light, Raoul could not help forgetting De Guiche for a moment in order to seek out Louise, who amid her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. The men were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his haughty carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some few of the older courtiers remembered having seen the father, and their remembrance was in no way prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him of Belle-Isle. "I cannot speak to him at present," said Raoul.

"Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns."

"See! our deliverer approaches," said Raoul, perceiving D'Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the Musketeers, had just made his victorious entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D'Artagnan.

"The Comte de la Fère has been looking for you, Chevalier," said Raoul.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "I have just left him."

"I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together."

"We have arranged to meet again."

As he answered Raoul, his wandering looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle which perceives its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D'Artagnan saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain's inquiring and haughty glance was directed.

"Chevalier," said Raoul, "there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service."

"What is it, my dear viscount?"

"It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I have a word or two to say; and as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for me to break into the middle of the conversation."

"Ah! is M. Fouquet there?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Do you not see him? — There!"

"Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a better right than you?"

"You are a far more important personage."

"Yes, you 're right; I am captain of the Musketeers. I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period that I am always forgetting my dignity."

"You will do me the service, will you not?"

"M. Fouquet — the deuce!"

"Are you not on good terms with him?"

"It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it will be necessary that some day or other —"

"Stay! I think he is looking at you; or can it really be —"

"No, no, don't deceive yourself; it is indeed me for whom this honor is intended."

"The opportunity is a good one, then."

"Do you think so?"

"Pray go."

"I am going."

De Guiche had not lost sight of Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D'Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and courteously saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

"Good-evening, M. d'Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle-en-Mer," said Fouquet, with that perfect knowledge of the usages of society and of the language of the eyes which it requires half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons notwithstanding all their study never attain.

"Of Belle-Isle-en-Mer? Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?"

"M. Fouquet has just told me that he had presented it to the king," said Buckingham.

"Do you know Belle-Isle, Chevalier?" inquired Fouquet, of the musketeer.

"I have been there only once," replied D'Artagnan, with readiness and good humor.

"Did you remain there long?"

"Scarcely a day, Monseigneur."

"Did you see much of it?"

"All that could be seen in a day."

"A day amounts to a great deal with an observation as keen as yours," said Fouquet; at which D'Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. "M. Fouquet," said Buckingham, "I leave the captain with you; he is more learned than I am in bastions and scarps and counterscarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned to me." Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together. "Now, Raoul," said De Guiche, "there he is; be firm and quick!"

Buckingham, after having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The manœuvre was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant between the group of players and the gallery, where were walking some of the graver courtiers, who stopped now and then to converse. But at the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur, who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips.

"My dear duke," said he, with the most affectionate politeness, "is it true what I have just been told?"

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach, but had merely heard his voice. He started, in spite of himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. "Monseigneur," he asked, "what have they told your Highness that astonishes you so much?"

"That which throws me into despair, and will in truth be a real cause of mourning for the whole court."

"Your Highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure."

"Precisely."

"Alas, Monseigneur, having been in Paris scarcely five or six days, my departure can be a source of grief only to myself."

De Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. "His departure!" he murmured. "What is he saying?"

Philip continued with the same gracious air: "I can easily conceive, Monsieur, why the King of Great Britain recalls you; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed that we can let you go without great regret, and I beg you to receive the expression of my own."

"Believe me, Monseigneur," said the duke, "that if I leave the Court of France —"

"It is because you are recalled, I understand that; but if you think that the expression of my own wish on the subject may have some weight with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his Majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer."

"I am overwhelmed, Monseigneur, by so much kindness," replied Buckingham; "but I have received positive

commands. My stay in France was limited ; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago."

"Indeed," said Monsieur.

"Yes ; but," added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him, — "but I resemble that dweller in the East, who went mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, and who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The Court of France has its intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my Lord ; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my stay as your Highness has so kindly invited me."

"When do you leave?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.

"To-morrow, Monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days past."

The Duc d'Orléans made a movement of the head, which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, Duke, there is nothing to be said."

Buckingham raised his eyes to the princesses ; his glance met that of Anne of Austria, who thanked him and showed her approval by a gesture. Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile his heart's anguish ; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite side. Raoul feared that the impatient young man was coming to make the proposition himself, and hurried forward before him.

"No, no, Raoul ; all is useless now," said De Guiche, holding both his hands towards the duke, and leading him

behind a column. "Oh, Duke, Duke!" said he, "forgive me for what I wrote to you! I was mad; give me back my letter!"

"It is true," replied the young duke, with a melancholy smile, "that you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."

"Forgive me, Duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship, is yours."

"Why indeed, Count, should you bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again?"

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was useless between the two young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces, — a movement which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham.

"A wise retreat," said De Wardes.

"Why so?"

"Because the dear duke saves a sword-thrust by it;" and both began to laugh.

Raoul, indignant, turned round with brow contracted, flushed with anger, and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned away upon his heel, but De Wardes remained firm and waited. "Will you never break yourself of the habit of insulting the absent?" said Raoul to De Wardes. "Yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan; to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"You know very well, Monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes touched Raoul; their shoulders met, their faces were bent towards each other, as if to be mutually inflamed by the fire of their breath and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of his anger, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a

voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced."

They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who with a smiling eye and a cheerful face had just placed his hand on De Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul abandoned to him. "Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes." Then his smile faded away, and his glance became cold and sharp as a steel blade.

"I am at your orders, Monsieur," said De Wardes.

"For a very long time, Monsieur," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to-day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit; but if you will take the trouble to come to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery —"

"I will follow you, Monsieur," said De Wardes.

"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.

"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

"That is well," said D'Artagnan. "But two persons are not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust."

"Certainly," said the young man, who did not know the object which D'Artagnan had in view. "As many as you please."

"Friends?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Real friends?"

"No doubt of it."

"Very well; get a good supply, then. Do you come too, Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham, if you please."

"What an ado!" replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain made him a slight sign with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient. "I never get excited," said he. "Well, then, I shall expect you, Monsieur."

"I will be there."

"Till then, *au revoir!*" and he led the way to his apartments.

D'Artagnan's apartment was not unoccupied; the Comte de la Fère, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, as he saw him enter.

"Well," said the latter, "M. de Wardes has done me the honor to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends as well as of ours."

In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and as he entered, he looked all around the room, and perceiving the count, went and placed himself by his side. D'Artagnan received his visitors with all the courtesy of which he was capable; he preserved his unmoved and unruffled look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying positions at court. After he had apologized to each of them for any inconvenience he might have caused them, D'Artagnan turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his great self-command, could not prevent his face from betraying some surprise mingled with uneasiness.

"Now, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "since we are no

longer within the precincts of the king's palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fère, has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father."

"Perfectly true, Monsieur; I have said so," replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with color.

"You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or of a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms."

"In the presence of witnesses?"

"Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honor."

"You do not appreciate my delicacy, Monsieur. I have accused you, it is true; but I have kept the nature of the accusation a secret. I have not entered into any details, but have contented myself with expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken into consideration the discreetness I have shown, although you were interested in my remaining silent. I can hardly recognize your customary prudence in that, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, who was gnawing the end of his mustache, said, "I have already had the honor to beg you to set forth the grievances you have against me."

"Aloud?"

"Certainly, aloud."

"In that case I will speak."

"Speak, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "we are all listening to you."

"Well, Monsieur, it is not a question of an injury towards myself, but of one towards my father."

"That you have already stated."

"Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with great hesitation."

"If that hesitation in your case really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it."

"Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?"

"Yes; in every and any case."

The witnesses of this scene had at first looked at one another with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that the face of D'Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever. De Wardes still kept silence. "Speak, Monsieur!" said the musketeer; "you see that you are keeping us waiting."

"Listen, then! My father loved a woman of noble birth, and this woman loved my father." D'Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: "M. d'Artagnan intercepted some letters which indicated an assignation, substituted himself under a disguise for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness."

"That is true," said D'Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. "Yes, I was guilty of that dishonorable action. You should have added, Monsieur, since you are so impartial, that at the period when the circumstance with which you reproach me happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age."

"The action is not the less shameful on that account," said De Wardes; "and it is quite sufficient for a gen-

tleman to have attained the age of reason, to avoid committing any act of indelicacy."

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment and almost of doubt.

"It was a most shameful deception, I admit," said D'Artagnan, "and I have not waited for M. de Wardes's reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly too. Age has made me more reasonable, and above all more upright, and this injury has been atoned for by lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period happily for yourselves known to you by tradition only at a period when love was not over-scrupulous, when consciences did not distil, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting or being attacked, our swords always out of the scabbard or at least half drawn. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. In short, I have repented of it; and more than that, — I still repent it, M. de Wardes."

"I can well understand that, Monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady's disgrace. She of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront she had received, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her."

"Stay!" said the Comte de la Fère, stretching his hand towards De Wardes with a sinister smile; "you are mistaken. She was seen; and there are persons even now present who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognize her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England."

"Married?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"So you were not aware that she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself, M. de Wardes. Do you happen to know that she was usually styled 'Milady,' without the addition of any name to that title?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Good heavens!" murmured Buckingham.

"Very well, Monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d'Artagnan's life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d'Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was that this woman, when in England, by her seductions completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord Winter, by the name of Felton. You change color, my Lord Buckingham, and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your Grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who that woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father's murderer."

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators. "You see, M. de Wardes," said D'Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived while Athos was speaking, — "you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of a soul, and that the soul in question was altogether lost before my offence. It is, however, a matter of conscience on my part. Now that this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me, M. de Wardes, to ask with the greatest humility your forgiveness for this shameless deed, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father if he were still alive, and if I had met him

after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I."

"That is too much, M. d'Artagnan," exclaimed many voices, with animation.

"No, gentlemen," said the captain. "And now, M. de Wardes, I hope that all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me. Do you consider the matter cleared up?"

De Wardes bowed, stammering his excuses.

"I trust, also," said D'Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, "that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as you have the unpleasant habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it has happened, — you, I say, who advocate such purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or to the principles of honor. And now listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale with which your name may be associated reaches my ear!"

"Monsieur," said De Wardes, "it is useless threatening to no purpose."

"I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes," replied D'Artagnan, "and you must listen to me still further." The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer together. "You spoke just now of the honor of a woman and of the honor of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and rectitude, which did not exist, it seems, in our minds, lives in those of our children; and it is delightful, too, to see a young man at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honor of women respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lips and clinched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the beginning of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate.

"How did it happen, then," continued D'Artagnan, "that you allowed yourself to say to M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eye flashed, as darting forward he exclaimed, "Monsieur the Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" at which exclamation De Wardes smiled maliciously.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying, "Do not interrupt me, young man!" and looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued: "I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honor, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honor. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M. de Wardes: What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man in offending his father and mother at the same time?"

"It seems to me," returned De Wardes, "that liberty of speech is allowed when it is ready to be supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal."

"Ah, Monsieur, tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression."

"The sword."

"You fail in your argument, not only in logic, but in religion and honor. You expose the lives of many others, without referring to your own, which seems to be much exposed to danger. Besides, fashions pass away, Monsieur; and the fashion of duelling has passed away, with-

out referring in any way to the edicts of his Majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once apologize to M. Raoul de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed not in his heart alone, but still more in every action of his life. You will do this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did it just now to your boy's mustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.

"In that case the result will be —"

"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing; "the result will be that your plan of conciliation will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."

"Not so," said the captain, quietly; "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"

"The result will be that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services dating from a period when you were not born, and who at my request has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastille; and I shall say to the king, 'Sire, a man has in a cowardly manner insulted M. de Bragelonne, in the person of his mother; I have written this man's name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your Majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. de Wardes is in the Bastille for three years.'" And D'Artagnan, drawing from his pocket the order signed by the king, held it towards De Wardes; then, seeing that the young man was not quite convinced and received the warning as an idle threat, he shrugged his shoulders, and walked leisurely towards the table,

upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have appalled the topographer Porthos.

De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastille even at that period was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and in an almost unintelligible voice, said, "I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d'Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you."

"One moment, Monsieur," said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity; "you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, 'and which I am forced to make;' I said, 'and which my conscience induces me to make.' This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments."

"I subscribe to it, then," said De Wardes; "but really, gentlemen, you must admit that a sword-thrust through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this."

"No, Monsieur," replied Buckingham; "for the sword-thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong, — it only showed that he was more or less skilful."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes.

"There now," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering you a service in stopping you in time."

"Is that all, Monsieur?" inquired De Wardes.

"Absolutely everything," replied D'Artagnan; "and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you."

"Believe me, Monsieur," rejoined De Wardes, "that your reconciliations are not successful."

"In what way?"

"Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever."

"You are deceived, Monsieur, so far as I am concerned," returned Raoul; "for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you."

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes; he cast his eyes around him like a man utterly bewildered. D'Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation, and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. "Oh!" exclaimed the young man, abandoning himself to the rage which consumed him, "can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?"

"You can, Monsieur, for I am here!" whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who having probably remained behind with that intention had just approached him. "You, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Yes, I! I am no subject of the King of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage that I too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d'Artagnan's principles extremely, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and in my turn I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, my dear M. de Wardes, are so terribly incensed, take me for an object of attack. In thirty-four hours' time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter with company

than if taken alone. We will draw our swords when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the daytime, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six."

"Very well," replied De Wardes, "I accept."

"I assure you," said the duke, "that if you kill me you will be rendering me an infinite service."

"I will do my utmost to be agreeable to you, Duke," said De Wardes.

"It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?"

"I shall be at your commands. I require some real danger and some mortal risk to tranquillize me?"

"In that case I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning my valet will tell you the exact hour of departure. We will travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can. Adieu!"

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned to the king's apartments. De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais-Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

CHAPTER XXV.

BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN.

After the rather severe lesson administered to the Wardes, Athos and D'Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais-Royal.

"You perceive," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes; for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked."

"I know these fellows well," replied D'Artagnan; "I have had an affair with the father. I assure you that although at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage, — I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him, — ah, my friend, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest, — a hand like quicksilver; you knew its quality, Athos, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer a piece of steel; it was a serpent which assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head, — in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half-a-dozen feet, then three, and then body to body. I pressed my antagonist closely; then I darted back again ten feet. No human power could resist that ferocious ardor. Well, De Wardes, the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, kept me busy a long time; and my fingers at the end of the engagement were, I well remember, tired enough."

"It is, then, as I said," resumed Athos: "the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for."

"Agreed. But Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes,—he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king cannot take offence; besides, we shall know how to pacify his Majesty. But why are you so full of these fears and anxieties? You are not easily alarmed."

"I will tell you what makes me anxious. Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his Majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper; and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode."

"We will prevent the explosion, my friend."

"Not I," said Athos, "for I must return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, disgust me. I am no longer a young man who can accustom himself to the meannesses of the present day. I have read in the great Book of God many things too beautiful and too great to take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In a word, I am sick of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you always, I wish to return to Blois."

"How wrong you are, Athos, — how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your nature! Men of your stamp are created to continue to the very last moment in full possession of their faculties. Look at my old sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at Rochelle; it served

me for thirty years without fail. One day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor of the Louvre and broke off short. I had a hunting-knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; M. Fouquet will not last so long as my Spanish blade."

"Is it possible," said Athos, smilingly, "that my friend D'Artagnan, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have a more exalted ambition, D'Artagnan. To be a minister, to be a slave, never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard you occasionally call me 'the great Athos;' I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no; I do not yield myself in this manner."

"We will not speak of it any more, then; renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us."

"Oh, my dear friend, what you say is almost cruel!"

D'Artagnan pressed Athos's hand warmly. "No, no; renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you; I am at Paris."

"Well, then, I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again."

"You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?"

"Grimaud is asleep; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; but if it were necessary to retrace the forty leagues which separate us from Blois without taking breath, he

would die in the attempt without a murmur. But I don't wish to lose Grimaud."

"You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. Holloa! some one there," called out D'Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade, — the heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared, — "I wish some gentleman who is so disposed to escort the Comte de la Fère," cried D'Artagnan.

"Thank you for your readiness, gentlemen," said Athos; "I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner."

"I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fère," said some one, "if I had not to speak to M. d'Artagnan."

"Who is that?" said D'Artagnan, looking into the darkness.

"I, M. d'Artagnan."

"Heaven forgive me, if that is not M. Baisemeaux's voice!"

"It is, Monsieur."

"What are you doing there in the courtyard, my dear Baisemeaux?"

"I am waiting your orders, my dear M. d'Artagnan."

"Wretch that I am!" said D'Artagnan; "true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?"

"I came because I had occasion to speak to you."

"You did not send to me?"

"I waited until you were disengaged," said M. Baisemeaux, timidly.

"I must leave you, D'Artagnan," said Athos to his friend.

"Not before I have presented M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastille."

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other.

"Surely you must know each other," added D'Artagnan.

"I have an indistinct recollection of M. Baisemeaux," said Athos.

"My dear friend, you remember Baisemeaux, that king's guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal's time."

"Perfectly," said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

"M. le Comte de la Fère, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos," whispered D'Artagnan to Baisemeaux.

"Yes, yes; a brave man, one of the famous four."

"Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?"

"If you please."

"In the first place, as for the orders, there are none. The king has decided not to arrest the person in question."

"So much the worse," said Baisemeaux, with a sigh.

"What do you mean by 'so much the worse'?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, laughing.

"No doubt of it," returned the governor of the Bastille; "my prisoners are my income."

"I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light."

"And so there are no orders," repeated Baisemeaux, with a sigh. "What an admirable situation yours is, Captain," he continued, after a pause, — "captain-lieutenant of the Musketeers!"

"Oh, it is good enough; but I don't see why you should envy me, — you, governor of the Bastille, the first castle in France."

"I am well aware of that," said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

"You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours."

"Don't speak of profits to me, if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish."

"Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself, — you whose business it is to arrest and guard others?"

"I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favor."

"Baisemeaux, you seem to forget that we are acquaintances of five-and-thirty years' standing. Don't assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable! I don't eat governors of the Bastille raw."

"Heaven be praised!"

"Come into the courtyard with me; it's a beautiful moonlight night. We will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your mournful tale. Come!" He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and in his rough, good-humored way, cried: "Out with it! rattle away, Baisemeaux! what have you got to say?"

"It 's a long story."

"You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I'll wager you are making fifty thousand livres out of your pigeons in the Bastille."

"Would to Heaven that were so, M. d'Artagnan!"

"You surprise me, Baisemeaux. Just look at yourself; you are the picture of melancholy. I should like to lead you before a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would look hardly fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken."

"All quite true."

"Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand livres' profit you make." At this remark Baisemeaux stamped his foot.

"There, there," said D'Artagnan, "I will run up your account for you: you were captain of M. de Mazarin's Guards, — twelve thousand livres a year; you received that for twelve years, — total, one hundred and forty-four thousand livres."

"Twelve thousand livres! Are you mad?" cried Baisemeaux; "the old miser gave me no more than six thousand, and the expenses of the post amounted to sixty-five hundred. M. Colbert, who deducted the other six thousand livres, condescended to allow me to take fifty pistoles as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in twelve thousand livres a year, I could not have met my obligations."

"I will not insist on your convicting yourself; but how about the fifty thousand livres from the Bastille? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your six thousand livres' salary."

"Admitted!"

"Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who on an average bring you in a thousand livres a year each."

"I don't deny it."

"Well, there is an income of fifty thousand livres; you have held the post three years, and must have received in that time one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"You forget one circumstance, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"What is that?"

"That while you received your appointment as captain from the king's hands, I received mine as governor from Messieurs Tremblay and Louvière."

"Quite right; and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing."

"Nor was Louvière, either; the result was that I gave seventy-five thousand livres to Tremblay as his share."

"Very agreeable that! and to Louvière?"

"The same."

"Money down?"

"No; that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. de Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two precious sports, sprung from the barricades; he permitted them, therefore, to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement."

"What were those conditions?"

"Frightful! — three years' income as a bonus."

"The deuce! so that the one hundred and fifty thousand livres have passed into their hands."

"Precisely so."

"And beyond that?"

"A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand crowns, or fifteen thousand pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments."

"Exorbitant enough."

"Yes; but that is not all."

"What besides?"

"In default of the fulfilment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that."

"It is enormous, incredible!"

"Such is the fact, however."

"I do indeed pity you, my poor Baisemeaux! But why, in the name of fortune, did M. de Mazarin grant you this pretended favor? It would have been more simple to refuse you altogether."

"Certainly, but he was forced to do so by my patron."

"Your patron! Who is that?"

"One of your own friends, indeed; M. d'Herblay."

"M. d'Herblay! Aramis!"

"Just so; he has been very kind to me."

"Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain!"

"Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal's service. M. d'Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louvière and Tremblay; they objected. I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d'Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for each payment."

"Aramis? You astound me! Aramis become your surety?"

"Like a man of honor. He procured the signature Tremblay and Louvière resigned their appointments. I have to pay every year twenty-five thousand livres to one of those two gentlemen; every year, too, in May, M. d'Herblay himself comes to the Bastille, and brings me twenty-five hundred pistoles to distribute to my crocodiles."

"You owe Aramis one hundred and fifty thousand livres, then?"

"Alas, that is why I am in despair, for I owe him only one hundred thousand."

"I don't quite understand you."

"He has come only two years. To-day, however, is the thirty-first of May, and he has not come yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if therefore I don't pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain. I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have worked for three years, and given two hundred and fifty thousand livres for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d'Artagnan."

"This is very strange," murmured D'Artagnan.

"You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead, can you not?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that I shall have only my eyes left me to weep with."

"This is disheartening."

"I have come to you, M. d'Artagnan, for you are the only one who can get me out of my trouble."

"In what way?"

"You are acquainted with the Abbé d'Herblay, and you know that he is somewhat mysterious."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you can perhaps give me the address of his presbytery; for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there."

"I should think not, indeed. He is bishop of Vannes."

"What! Vannes in Bretagne?"

"Yes."

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, "How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow? I am a lost man."

"Your despair quite distresses me."

"Vannes, Vannes!" cried Baisemeaux.

"But, listen! A bishop is not always a resident. M. d'Herblay may possibly not be so far away as you fear."

"Oh, tell me his address!"

"I really don't know it, my friend."

"In that case I am utterly lost. I will go and throw myself at the king's feet."

"But, Baisemeaux, you astonish me; why, since the

Bastille is capable of producing fifty thousand livres a year, have you not tried to screw one hundred thousand out of it?"

"Because I am an honest man, M. d'Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like potentates."

"Well, you are in a fair way to get out of your difficulties; give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your high living, and die of a surfeit between now and midday to-morrow."

"How can you be cruel enough to laugh?"

"Nay, you really distress me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honor, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you.

"Never, never!"

"You wish to put your hand on Aramis?"

"At any cost."

"Well, go and find M. Fouquet."

"What connection —"

"Ninny that you are! Don't you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or that Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d'Herblay to that bishopric."

"I see, I see; you restore me to life again."

"So much the better. Now go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Of course, of course," said Baisemeaux, eagerly.

"But," said D'Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, "your word of honor?"

"My sacred word of honor," replied the little man, about to set off running.

"Where are you going?"

"To M. Fouquet's house."

"Don't do that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning."

"I will do so. Thank you."

"Good luck attend you!" said D'Artagnan.

"Thank you."

"This is a strange affair," murmured D'Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. "What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or other."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KING'S CARD-TABLE.

FOUQUET was present, as D'Artagnan had said, at the king's card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham's departure had shed a balm upon all the ulcerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Comte de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing conversed with him upon the circumstances of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful and kind, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless love at Madame, who in her elation of spirits divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice; for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remembrance, and no longer a man.

Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little plans of selfish comfort. Madame had received Buckingham's smiles and attentions and sighs while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the channel, which toss the mighty vessels

to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not help noticing this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt by it. Of a sensitive character, proud, and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which the passion had entered his heart. The glances which he bestowed upon Madame became colder as his thoughts grew cold. He could hardly yet rise above his trouble, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she increased her activity to regain the light which she was about to lose; her wit, timid and wavering at first, was displayed in brilliant flashes; at any cost, she felt that she must be observed above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so; for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened from the very first, and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henrietta, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV. The king so jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of all those who surrounded him, could not help admitting himself vanquished by that petulance which was so thoroughly French in its nature, and whose energy was more than ever increased by its English humor. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit enhanced. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Mirth escaped from her ruby lips, like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, submissive to her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world by the people

worthy to be called the wittiest and most polished in the world.

Madame from that evening enjoyed a success capable of bewildering any one who had not been born in those elevated regions which surround a throne, and which in spite of their elevation are proof against such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as an important personage. Buckingham regarded her as a coquette deserving the cruellest tortures, De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity, and the courtiers as a star whose light might become the focus of all favor and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years before, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly creature" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this coquette on his knees, while De Guiche had looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to displease the monarch whom this star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer like all women, and imperious like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and bowed before it immediately, — a circumstance which induced the young queen to leave the room and retire to her apartments. The king paid hardly any attention to her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Fortified by the rules of etiquette which he had begun to introduce at the court, as an element of every position and relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother,

and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked that at the threshold of the door his Majesty, freed from every restraint, or not strong enough for the situation, let a deep sigh escape him. The ladies present — for nothing escapes a woman's observation, Mademoiselle de Montalais's for instance — did not fail to say to one another, "The king sighed;" and "Madame sighed too." This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment much more dangerous to the king's repose. Madame had sighed, closing her beautiful black eyes; then, opening them, laden as they were with an indescribable melancholy, she had raised them to the king, whose face at that moment had visibly heightened in color. The consequence of these blushes, of these interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation was that Montalais committed an indiscretion, which certainly affected her companion; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, less clear-sighted perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed, and, her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess, without thinking to take the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that this young country-girl might allege as an excuse the agitation into which the king threw her; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backward, had his face towards it.

The king returned to the card-room. He tried to speak to the different persons there, but it could easily be seen that his mind was absent. He jumbled different scores together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained that habit since the time of M. de Mazarin, — the habit of exercising bad memory and good calculation. In this way Manicamp, absent-

minded as he was, — for M. Manicamp was the most honest man in the world, believe me, dear reader, — innocently appropriated twenty thousand livres, which were littering the table, and which did not seem legitimately to belong to any person in particular. In the same way M. de Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, left to the Duke of Buckingham sixty double louis which he had won, which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left to the candelabra, which could not protect their property.

The king regained his presence of mind in some degree when M. Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and with great respect indeed, but with much urgency, whispered a word of some sort in the still confused hearing of his Majesty. Louis, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention, and immediately looking around him, said, "Is M. Fouquet no longer here?"

"Yes, Sire, I am here," replied the voice of the superintendent, who was engaged with Buckingham; and he approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet unceremonious air.

"Forgive me," said Louis, "if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention whenever I may require your services."

"I am always at the king's service," replied Fouquet.

"And your cash-box too," said the king, laughing with a false smile.

"My cash-box more than anything else," said Fouquet, coldly.

"The fact is, Monsieur, I wish to give a *fête* at Fontainebleau, — to keep open house for a fortnight; and I shall require — " He stopped, glancing at Colbert.

Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert's cruel smile — "four million livres."

"Four million?" repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. The nails of the hand which was thrust in his bosom made bleeding furrows in his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remained unaltered. "When will they be required, Sire?"

"Take your time, — I mean — no, no; as soon as possible."

"A certain time will be necessary, Sire."

"Time!" exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly.

"The time, Monsieur," said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, "simply to count the money; a million only can be drawn and weighed in a day."

"Four days, then," said Colbert.

"My clerks," replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, "will perform wonders for his Majesty's service, and the sum shall be ready in three days."

It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friendship, — an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for in reality he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen which covered his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best humor; the result of their discernment was that his orders were executed with that exactitude of manœuvre which is found on board a man-of-war commanded during a storm

by a passionate captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along, — it flew.

Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably from a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a mountain of crawfish; he had then had his body anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old, and when the anointment was completed, he was wrapped in flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing-gown, he wrote letter after letter in his fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume.

The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, and care-worn. Aramis looked up. "Good-evening," said he; and his searching look detected his host's sadness and disordered state of mind. "Was the play good at his Majesty's?" asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and with a gesture showed the door to the servant who had followed him; then when the servant had left, he said, "Excellent."

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. "You have lost, as usual?" inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.

"More than usual," replied Fouquet.

"You know how to support losses."

"Sometimes."

"What! M. Fouquet a bad player!"

"There is play and play, M. d'Herblay."

"How much have you lost?" inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, to regain his usual command of his voice, and then, without the slightest emotion, said, "The evening has cost me four millions;" and a bitter laugh drowned the last vibration of these words.

Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. "Four millions!" said he; "you have lost four millions, — impossible!"

"M. Colbert held my cards for me," replied the superintendent, with the same bitter laugh.

"Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?"

"Yes, my friend, and from the king's own lips. It is impossible to destroy a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?"

"It is clear that your ruin is the object in view."

"So that is still your opinion?"

"Yes. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along."

"Yes; but I did not expect four millions."

"No doubt the amount is serious; but after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is M. Fouquet."

"My dear D'Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers you would be less easy."

"And you promised?"

"What else could I do?"

"That 's true."

"The very day when I refuse, Colbert will procure it; whence I know not, but he will procure the money, and I shall be lost."

"There is no doubt of that. In how many days hence have you promised these four millions?"

"In three days; the king seemed exceedingly pressed."

"In three days?"

"Oh, my friend," resumed Fouquet, "when I think that just now, as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, 'There is the rich M. Fouquet,' it is enough to turn my brain."

"Stay, Monsieur! the matter is not worth so much trouble," said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written.

"Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy."

"There is only one remedy for you, — pay."

"But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted: Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid; and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? For be very sure that we are not through with it all. When kings have tasted money, they are like tigers who have tasted flesh, — they devour everything. The day will come when I shall have to say, 'Impossible, Sire,' and on that very day I am a lost man."

Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying, "A man in your position, my Lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so."

"A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to struggle against a king."

"Nonsense; when I was young I struggled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was King of France, — nay more, cardinal."

"Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle."

"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention; and when you think all is lost, something unexpected will be discovered which shall save everything."

"Who will discover this marvellous something?"

"Yourself."

"I! I resign my office of inventor."

"Then I will."

"Be it so. But then, set to work without delay."

"Oh, we have time enough!"

"You are killing me, D'Herblay, with your calmness," said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his brow.

"Do you not remember that I once told you never to make yourself uneasy, if you possess but courage. Have you any?"

"I believe so."

"Then don't make yourself uneasy."

"It is decided, then, that at the last moment you will come to my assistance."

"It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you, Monseigneur."

"It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D'Herblay."

"If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is a virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion do you act, Monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we shall see what is to be done."

"We shall see, then, in a very short time."

"Very well. Now, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I was myself about to ask you for some."

"For yourself?"

"For myself or some of my people, — for mine or for ours."

"How much do you want?"

"Be easy on that score, — a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant."

"Tell me the amount."

"Fifty thousand livres."

"Oh, a mere nothing! Of course one has always fifty thousand livres. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are? I should give myself far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?"

"To-morrow morning; but you require to know its destination?"

"Nay, nay, Chevalier, I need no explanation."

"You must have one: to-morrow is the 1st of June."

"Well?"

"One of our bonds becomes due."

"I did not know we had any bonds."

"Certainly; to-morrow we pay our last third."

"What third?"

"Of the one hundred and fifty thousand livres to Baisemeaux."

"Baisemeaux, — who is he?"

"The governor of the Bastille."

"Ah! yes, I remember; but on what grounds am I to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres to that man?"

"On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louvière and Tremblay."

"My recollection of the whole matter is very vague."

"That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to; however, I do not believe you have any affair of greater importance than this one."

"Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment."

"Why, in order to render him a service, in the first place, and afterwards ourselves."

"Ourselves? You are joking."

"Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastille may prove a very excellent acquaintance."

"I have not the good fortune to understand you, D'Herblay."

"Monseigneur, we have our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we might need our own governor of the Bastille."

"Do you think so?"

"Let us not deceive ourselves, Monseigneur; we are very liable to pay the Bastille a visit, my dear M. Fouquet," added the prelate, displaying beneath his pale lips teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so admired thirty years before by Marie Michon.

"And you think it is not too much to pay one hundred and fifty thousand livres for that, D'Herblay? I assure you that you generally invest your money better."

"The day will come when you will admit your mistake."

"My dear D'Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastille, he is no longer protected by the past."

"Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular; besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier's heart. I am certain, my Lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgments."

"What a bedevilled affair, — usury in a matter of benevolence!"

"Do not mix yourself up with it, Monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practise it, and both of us profit by it, — that is all."

"Some intrigue, D'Herblay?"

"I do not deny it."

"And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?"

"Why not? there are worse accomplices than he. May I depend, then, upon the five thousand pistoles to-morrow?"

"Do you want them this evening?"

"It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has become of me, and must be upon thorns."

"You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D'Herblay, the interest of your one hundred and fifty thousand livres will never pay my four millions for me!" said Fouquet, rising.

"Why not, Monseigneur?"

"Good-night; I have business with my clerks before I retire."

"A good night's rest, Monseigneur."

"D'Herblay, you wish me what is impossible."

"Shall I have my fifty thousand livres this evening?"

"Yes."

"Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety; it is I who tell you to do so. Good-night, Monseigneur!"

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head and heaving a sigh.

CHAPTER XXVII.

M. BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN'S LITTLE ACCOUNTS.

THE clock of St. Paul's was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, — that is to say, in a colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him except a kind of hunting-knife by his side, — passed before the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastille. Two sentries were on duty at the gate ; they raised no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about to begin. The sentinel at the outer guard-house stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained with his usual politeness that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival very attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor, whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard, and who in his turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's

request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name.

"I cannot tell it to you, Monsieur," said Aramis; "but be assured that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor that I can only guarantee that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you shall have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the 1st of June, I am convinced that he will hasten here himself."

The officer could not be made to believe that a man of the governor's station should put himself out for a man of so little importance as the bourgeois-looking person on horseback appeared to be. "It happens most fortunately, Monsieur," he said, "that Monsieur the Governor is just getting ready to go out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed in the government courtyard; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by."

Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as for a suspected stranger: the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that in this way the sentinel could convince himself that no one was smuggled out of the Bastille.

The carriage rolled along under the archway; but at

the moment when the iron gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had stopped for the second time, and spoke a few words to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the window, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He straightway uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out, of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He came very near kissing him.

"What a difficult matter to enter the Bastille, Monsieur the Governor!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, Monseigneur! How delighted I am to see your Grace!"

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. de Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

"Pray excuse me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux.

"No, no," said Aramis; "I have five thousand pistoles in the portmanteau."

The governor's countenance became so radiant that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the blood had arrived. "Yes, you are right; the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay, and it shall take us back to my house."

"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard, Monsieur the Governor! Do you believe that I am so great an invalid? No, no; we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands

and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bare and black walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule, a straight staircase of white stone, led to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux crossed the antechamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small private door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. He installed the prelate with that obsequious politeness of which a good man or a grateful man alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him on which to rest his hand, — everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with an almost religious solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with as much reverence as that with which a priest bears the holy sacrament. The soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked searchingly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further. "Well, Monseigneur," said he, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, but a duty as well."

"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but your affair with me is not of that character, my Lord, — it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come, come, dear M. de Baisemeaux, confess that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."

"About your health, yes, certainly," stammered Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able,

as I was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."

"You are really very kind, Monseigneur."

"And it was a good thing for me that I was punctual, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you were going out."

At this latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, "Yes, it is true I was going out."

"Then I incommode you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glance upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."

"Ah! Monseigneur, how can you imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?"

"Confess that you were going in quest of money."

"No," stammered Baisemeaux, "no; I assure you I was going to —"

"Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet's?" suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. "No, no!" he exclaimed in a state of desperation; "who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? Are you drunk below there? Why am I interrupted when I am busy?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, biting his lips, — "to the abbé's or the superintendent's?"

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. "To Monsieur the Superintendent's," he said.

"It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to the person who gives it away?"

"I assure you, Monseigneur —"

"You distrusted me."

"My dear Lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found."

"You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet's, dear M. Baisemeaux, for he is a man whose hand is always open."

"I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address, that is all."

"To ask M. Fouquet for my address?" exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

"Yes," said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him, "at M. Fouquet's, certainly."

"There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux; only I would ask, Why ask my address of M. Fouquet?"

"That I might write to you."

"I understand," said Aramis, smiling; "but that is not what I meant. I do not ask you what you required my address for; I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?"

"Oh!" said Baisemeaux, "as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes —"

"But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew that I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address."

"Well, Monsieur," said Baisemeaux, at his wits' end, "if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely."

"Nonsense!" observed Aramis, calmly; "how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?" And while he composed his face, and smiled cheerfully on the governor, he

was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, yet knew that Vannes was his residence. "I will clear all this up," he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added, "Well, my dear governor, shall we now arrange our little accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my Lord; but tell me beforehand, my Lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?"

"Very willingly indeed."

"That is right," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

"What does that mean?" inquired Aramis.

"That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly."

"And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think that you are acting ceremoniously with me."

"Oh, no, indeed! Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can."

"But why so?"

"Because not a prince, even, would have done what you have for me."

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"Nay, I assure you —"

"Let us speak of other matters," said Aramis; "or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on. Are the prisoners generous?"

"Not over-much."

"The deuce!"

"M. de Mazarin was not hard enough."

"Yes, I see; you need a suspicious government, — like that of the old cardinal, for instance."

"Yes; business was better under him. The brother of his 'gray Eminence' made his fortune in it."

"Believe me, my dear governor," said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvière and to Tremblay?"

"Good heavens! yes."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand livres which I have brought you?"

"Yes."

"You have not saved anything, then?"

"Ah, Monseigneur, in giving the fifty thousand livres of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I give them everything I earn. I told M. d'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but immediately became quiet again; "so you have seen my old friend D'Artagnan. How was he?"

"Wonderfully well."

"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness, — "I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Sixty."

"Well, that is a tolerably round number."

"Ah, Monseigneur, formerly there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."

"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."

"Perhaps not; for to anybody but myself each prisoner would bring in one hundred and fifty pistoles, — for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty livres a day."

"Only, you have no prince of the blood; at least, I

suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank Heaven! — I mean, no, unfortunately."

"Why do you say 'unfortunately'?"

"Because my position would be improved by it. So, fifty livres per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marshal of France — "

"But you have no more marshals of France just now, I suppose, than princes of the blood?"

"Alas! no; it is true that lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-four livres, and I have two of them. After that come the councillors of the parliament, who bring me fifteen livres, and I have six of them."

"I did not know," said Aramis, "that councillors were worth so much."

"Yes; but from fifteen livres I sink at once to ten, — namely, for an ordinary judge or for an ecclesiastic."

"And you have seven, you say; a fine catch!"

"Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some importance at all events, otherwise than I treat a councillor of the parliament?"

"Yes, you are right; I do not see five livres' difference between them."

"You understand, if I have a fine fish, I always pay four or five livres for it; if I get a fine fowl, it costs me a livre and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the multitude of rats which infest this place."

"Why not get half-a-dozen cats to deal with them?"

"Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. The

dogs have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill." Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought, — Aramis was meditating. "I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a passable fowl costs me a livre and a half, and that a good-sized fish costs me four or five livres. Three meals are served at the Bastille; and as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-livre man costs me seven livres and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten livres like those at fifteen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! Then you gain seven livres and a half upon those who pay you fifteen livres."

"I must compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw that he had been caught.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten livres?"

"Oh, yes; we have citizens and barristers taxed at five livres."

"And do they eat too?"

"Not a doubt about it; only, you understand they do not get a sole or a fat chicken or Spanish wines every day, but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish for their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."

"No; understand me. When the fifteen-livre has not eaten his fowl, or the ten-livre has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-livre prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."

"And what do you make out of your five-livre prisoners?"

"A livre and a half."

"Baisemeaux, you 're an honest fellow; in honest truth, I say so."

"Thank you, my Lord, I think you are quite right, now. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs' clerks, who are rated at three livres. Those do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon."

"But do not the five-livre gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?"

"Oh, my Lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that! I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of red partridge, a slice of venison, or a bit of truffled pasty, — dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams, and which are the leavings of the twenty-four-livre prisoners, — and he eats and drinks; at dessert he cries, 'Long live the king!' and blesses the Bastille; with a couple of bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked — and it does me infinite honor — that certain prisoners who have been set at liberty have almost immediately afterwards got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, if not to taste my fare? It is really the fact." Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

"You smile," said Baisemeaux.

"I do," returned Aramis.

"I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years."

"I must see it to believe it," said Aramis.

"Well, I can show it to you, although it is forbidden to exhibit the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes —"

"I should be delighted, I confess."

"Very well," said Baisemeaux; and he took out of a closet a large register. Aramis eagerly followed him with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, turned over the leaves for a minute, and stopped at the letter M.

"Look here, for instance," said he: "'Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661, pamphlets, Mazarinades, etc.' You understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastille for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here. And what was his object, Monsieur? None other than to return to eat my fare at three livres the head!"

"Three livres — poor devil!"

"The poet, my Lord, belongs to the lowest scale, to the same style of board to which the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk belong; but, I repeat, it is to these people only that I give those little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

"In 1661 you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"

"Yes, a poor devil of a student who made — What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?"

"A distich."

"Yes! that is it."

"Poor fellow! for a distich."

"*Peste!* How you go on! Do you not know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"

"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe."

"Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."

"Yes, I did so."

"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my Lord, since that time I have treated him as a prisoner at fifteen livres."

"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued to turn over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed that of Martinier.

"Yes, the same as that one."

"Is that Marchiali an Italian?" asked Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

"Hush!" said Baisemeaux.

"Why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clinching his white hand.

"I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali."

"No; this is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced."

"That may be, but I may have spoken to you about him without naming him."

"Is he an old offender?" asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

"On the contrary, he is quite young."

"Is his crime, then, very heinous?"

"Unpardonable."

"Has he assassinated any one?"

"Bah!"

"An incendiary, then?"

"Bah!"

"Has he slandered any one?"

"No, no! It is he who —" and Baisemeaux approached Aramis's ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered, — "it is he who presumes to resemble the —"

"Yes, yes," said Aramis, "I now remember that you spoke to me about it last year; but the crime appeared to me so slight."

"Slight!"

"Or rather, so involuntary."

"My Lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected."

"Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "if I am not mistaken, we are summoned."

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he closed, and put the key in his pocket. "Will it be agreeable to your Lordship to breakfast now?" said he; "for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced."

"Assuredly, my dear governor;" and they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S BREAKFAST.

ARAMIS was generally temperate; but on this occasion, while observing due caution in regard to the wine, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which in every respect was most excellent. The latter, for his part, was animated with the wildest gayety; the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, expanded his heart. Every now and then, too, he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude; while the latter, leaning back in his chair, sipped a few drops of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear an ill word against the fare of the Bastille," said he, half closing his eyes; "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of this Burgundy every day!"

"All those at fifteen livres drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student Seldon drink this excellent Volnay?"

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I heard you say that he was boarded at fifteen livres."

"He! No, indeed! A man who makes districts — distichs I mean — at fifteen livres! Nonsense! it is his neighbor who is at fifteen livres."

"Which neighbor?"

"The other; the second Bertaudière."

"Excuse me, my dear governor; but you speak a language which requires an apprenticeship to understand."

"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain: the second Bertaudière is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudière."

"So that Bertaudière is the name of one of the towers of the Bastille? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?"

"Look!" said Baisemeaux, going to the window. "It is that tower to the left, — the second one."

"Is the prisoner at fifteen livres there?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Seven or eight years, nearly."

"What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?"

"It was not in my time, dear M. d'Herblay."

"But I should have thought that Louvière or Tremblay would have told you."

"The secrets of the Bastille are never handed over with the keys of its governorship."

"Indeed! Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery, a State secret."

"Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a State secret, but a secret like everything else that happens at the Bastille."

"But," said Aramis, "why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of —"

"Of the second Bertaudière?"

"Yes."

"Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles —"

"Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?"

"Of course."

"The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?"

"They are always telling them that; it is a matter of course, — the same song over and over again."

"But does not the resemblance you were just now speaking about strike the turnkeys?"

"My dear M. d'Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court as you are, to take any trouble about such matters."

"You're right, you're right, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Just a drop more of that Volnay, if you please."

"Not a drop merely; a glass."

"Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A drop for me; a glass for yourself."

"As you please;" and Aramis and the governor touched glasses.

"But," said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby liquid he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses alike, — "but what you might call a resemblance, another would not perhaps take any notice of."

"Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles."

"I really think, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own imagination."

"Upon my honor, it is not so."

"Stay!" continued Aramis. "I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it."

"Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one; and if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so yourself."

"If I were to see him, indeed," said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; "but in all probability I never shall."

"Why not?"

"Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy that I was buried there forever."

"Oh, no; they are fine places to live in."

"I really do not and cannot believe it, and that is a fact."

"Pray do not speak ill of the second Bertaudière! It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best lodging the Bastille affords has been his. There is a chance for you."

"Nay, nay," said Aramis, coldly; "you will never make me believe that there are any good rooms in the Bastille; and as for your carpets, they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads too."

"Toads? Ah! I don't say there are not toads in the dungeons."

"But I should see no furniture and not a sign of a carpet."

"Will you be convinced by your own eyes?" said Baisemeaux, with sudden impulse.

"No, certainly not."

"Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you deny the existence of the carpets?"

"Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow, — an unhappy, dying man."

"Nothing of the kind, — as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived."

"Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?"

"Not at all; very gay and lively."

"Nonsense! you are joking."

"Will you follow me?" said Baisemeaux.

"What for?"

"To go the round of the Bastille."

"Why?"

"You will then see for yourself, — see with your own eyes."

"But the regulations?"

"Never mind them! To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the posts on the bastions; we are masters of the position."

"No, no, my dear governor! Why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts which we must draw makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in the second or fourth Bertaudière. Ugh! —"

"You are refusing a rare opportunity. Do you know that to obtain the favor I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand livres."

"Really! he must be worth seeing, then?"

"Forbidden fruit, my Lord, — forbidden fruit! You who belong to the Church ought to know that."

"Well, if I had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich."

"Very well, we will see him too, he is near by; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger."

"Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest."

"But a boarder at fifteen livres is always interesting."

"By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen livres for him, and only three livres for poor Seldon?"

"The distinction made in that instance was a truly

noble act, and one which displayed the king's goodness of heart to great advantage."

"The king's, you say?"

"The cardinal's, I mean; 'This unhappy man,' said M. de Mazarin, 'is destined to remain in prison forever.'"

"Why so?"

"Why, it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and consequently his punishment ought to be so too."

"Lasting?"

"No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, you see; and even that chance is unlikely, for we never have any impure air in the Bastille."

"Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. Do you mean to say, however, that this unfortunate man must suffer without respite and forever?"

"I did not say suffer, my Lord; a fifteen-livre boarder does not suffer."

"He suffers imprisonment, at all events."

"No doubt; there is no help for that. But this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat: for instance, such things as we have on the table now, — this pasty that has not been touched, these crawfish from the river Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters, — all these things will at once be taken to the second Bertaudière, with a bottle of that Volnay which you think so good. After you have seen it, you will believe it, I hope."

"Yes, my dear governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your blissful fifteen-livre prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protégé*."

"Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala-

day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves, with this small bottle of port."

"You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux."

"Well, let us set off, then," said the governor, a little giddy, partly from the wine he had drunk and partly from Aramis's praises.

"Do not forget that I go only to oblige you," said the prelate.

"Very well; but you will thank me when you get there."

"Let us go, then."

"Wait until I have summoned the jailer," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. "I am going to visit the towers," said the governor; "no guards, no drums, no noise at all!"

"If I were not to leave my cloak here," said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, "I should really think that I was going to prison on my own account." The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the courtyard drew themselves up in line, as stiff as posts, as the governor passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which brought them to a sort of esplanade; thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honors. The governor turned towards Aramis, and speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a word, he said, "I hope you have a good memory, Monsieur?"

"Why?" inquired Aramis.

"On account of your plans and measurements; for you know that no one, not even an architect, is allowed to enter where the prisoners are, if he has paper, pens, or pencil."

"Good," said Aramis to himself, "it seems that I am an architect, then? It sounds like one of D'Artagnan's jokes, who saw me acting as an engineer at Belle-Isle." Then he said aloud, "Be easy on that score, Monsieur; in our profession a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient."

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. "Very well; we will first visit La Bertaudière," said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added, "You will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out."

"Dear M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "you are always forgetting No. 3."

"So I am," said the governor; and upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for this single courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as is the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated as it were with the atmosphere of those gloomy arches moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt that he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, and he followed Baisemeaux without uttering a syllable.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECOND FLOOR OF LA BERTAUDIÈRE.

On the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breath of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. "Will you begin with this one?" said Baisemeaux; "for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second. There are, besides, certain repairs to be made in this chamber," he hastened to add for the benefit of the turnkey, who he saw was within the sound of his voice.

"No, no," exclaimed Aramis, eagerly; "higher, if you please, Monsieur the Governor. The one above is the more urgent." They continued their ascent.

"Ask the jailer for the keys," whispered Aramis.

Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and himself opened the door of room No. 3. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred. Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth of about eighteen years of age, who raising his head at the unusual noise jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands began to cry out, "My mother, my mother!" in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame.

"My dear boy," said Baisemeaux, endeavoring to smile, "I have brought you a diversion and an extra, — the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take some measures about here, and here are some preserves for your dessert."

"Oh, Monsieur," exclaimed the young man, "keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of that time I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall then see my mother again!"

"But, my dear friend," said Baisemeaux, "I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her; while here — upon my word!"

"If she were poor, Monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her! Badly lodged with her! oh, Monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free."

"At all events, since you yourself admit that you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich —"

"But without meaning anything, I swear; I was reading Martial when the idea came to me. Let me be punished, — cut off the hand with which I wrote it, I will work with the other, — but restore my mother to me!"

"My boy," said Baisemeaux, "you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, or slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates."

"My God!" exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the floor.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. "Poor wretch!" he murmured.

"Yes, Monsieur, he is indeed very wretched," said the jailer; "but it is his parents' fault."

"In what way?"

"Because they let him learn Latin. Too much knowledge, you see; there is the harm. Now I, for instance, can't read or write, and therefore I am not in prison."

Aramis looked at the man who did not call being a jailer in the Bastille being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset.

"You have forgotten to close the door," said the jailer.

"So I have," said Baisemeaux; "there are the keys, do you do it."

"I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy," said Aramis.

"And if you do not succeed," said Baisemeaux, "at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-livre list, by which both he and I shall be gainers."

"If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner," said Aramis, "I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measurements from outside."

"No fear of that, Monsieur architect," said the jailer. "This one here is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word."

"Let us go in, then," said Aramis, gloomily.

"Are you the architect of the prisons, Monsieur?" said the jailer.

"I am."

"It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this."

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions, he must summon all his strength of mind to

his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. "Stay outside," said he to the jailer, "and wait for us at the bottom of the steps." The jailer obeyed, and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard just beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an arm-chair, and all the upper part of his body reclining against it. His coat, thrown upon the bed, was of rich black velvet; and he inhaled the fresh air blowing in upon his breast, which was covered with a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognizing Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, slipped from his fingers as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux during this time, accustomed to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, was arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish which he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not notice how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said, "You are looking very well; I am glad to see that."

"Quite well, I thank you, Monsieur," replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis; and involuntarily he made a step forward, his

lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his occupation, could not help observing it. "This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney," said Baisemeaux; "does it smoke?"

"Never, Monsieur."

"You were saying just now," said the governor to Aramis, rubbing his hands together, "that it is not possible for a man to be happy in prison; here, however, is one who is so." Then turning to the prisoner, he said, "You have nothing to complain of, I hope?"

"Never."

"Do you ever feel low-spirited?" said Aramis.

"Never."

"Ha! ha!" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice; "was I right?"

"Well, my dear governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowable to put any questions to him?"

"As many as you like."

"Very well; be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here."

"Monsieur requests me to ask you," said Baisemeaux, "if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?"

"No, Monsieur," said the young man, unaffectedly, "I am not."

"But that is impossible," said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; "if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious."

"I was so during the earlier days of my imprisonment."

"Why are you not so now?"

"Because I have reflected."

"That is strange," said Aramis.

"Is it not odd?" said Baisemeaux.

"May one venture to ask you, Monsieur, on what you have reflected?"

"I felt that, as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me."

"What is a prison, then," inquired Aramis, "if it be not a punishment?"

"Alas! I cannot tell," said the young man; "all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago."

"To hear you converse, Monsieur, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment."

"I endure it."

"In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?"

"I have no certainty. Hope I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day."

"Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?"

"That is precisely the reason," replied the young man, "which prevents me from expecting liberty; why should I have been imprisoned at all, if it had been intended to release me afterwards?"

"How old are you?"

"I do not know."

"What is your name?"

"I have forgotten the name by which I was called."

"Who are your parents?"

"I never knew them."

"But those who brought you up?"

"They did not call me their son."

"Did you ever love any one before coming here?"

"I loved my nurse and my flowers."

"Was that all?"

"I also loved my valet."

"Do you regret your nurse and your valet?"

"I wept very much when they died."

"Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?"

"They died the evening before I was carried off."

"Both at the same time?"

"Yes, both at the same time."

"In what manner were you carried off?"

"A man came for me, made me get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here."

"Would you be able to recognize that man again?"

"He was masked."

"Is not this an extraordinary tale?" said Baisemeaux, in a low voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.

"It is indeed extraordinary," murmured Aramis.

"But what is still more extraordinary is that he has never told me so much as he has just told you."

"Perhaps the reason may be that you have never questioned him," said Aramis.

"It is possible," replied Baisemeaux; "I have no curiosity. Well, have you looked at the room; it's a fine one, is it not?"

"Very fine."

"A carpet —"

"Beautiful."

"I 'll wager he had nothing like it before he came here."

"I think so too." Then, again turning towards the young man, Aramis asked, "Do you not remember to have been visited, at some time or other, by a strange lady or gentleman?"

"Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came

to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she only raised when we were together and alone."

"Do you remember that woman?"

"Yes."

"What did she say to you?"

The young man smiled mournfully, "She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary."

"What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?"

"She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me."

"Do you remember her?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you recall her features distinctly?"

"Yes."

"You would recognize her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her presence?"

"Most certainly."

A flash of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis's face. At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer coming up again. "Shall we leave?" he said hastily to Aramis.

Aramis, who probably had learned all that he cared to know, replied, "When you like."

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head; while Aramis, with a respect arising doubtless from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them.

"Well," said Baisemeaux, on the staircase, "what do you think of it all?"

"I have discovered the secret, my dear governor," he said.

"Bah! What is the secret, then?"

"A murder was committed in that house."

"Nonsense!"

"But attend! the valet and the nurse died the same day."

"Well?"

"And by poison."

"Ah!"

"What do you think?"

"That it is very likely to be true — What! that young man is an assassin?"

"Who said that? What makes you think that poor boy could be an assassin?"

"The very thing I was saying."

"The crime was committed in his house, that is all; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might say something."

"The deuce! if I only thought that —"

"Well?"

"I would increase the watch over him."

"Oh! he does not seem to wish to escape."

"You do not know what prisoners are."

"Has he any books?"

"None; they are strictly prohibited, and by M. Mazarin's own hand."

"Have you the writing still?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; would you like to look at it as you return to get your cloak?"

"I should very much, for I like to look at autographs."

"This one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure."

"Ah! an erasure; and in what respect?"

"With respect to a figure. At first there was written: 'To be boarded at 50 livres.'"

"Like princes of the blood, in fact?"

"But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand, for he scratched out the zero, and has added a 1 before the 5. But, by the by —"

"What?"

"You do not speak of the resemblance."

"I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason, — because it does not exist."

"The deuce it does n't!"

"Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think you would do well not to speak about it."

"Really."

"The king Louis XIV., you understand, would be mortally angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him."

"It is true, quite true," said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; "but I have not spoken of the circumstance to any one but yourself, and you understand, Monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion."

"Oh, be easy!"

"Do you still wish to see the note?" said Baisemeaux, uneasily.

"Certainly."

While conversing thus, they had returned to the governor's apartments. Baisemeaux took from the closet a private register, like the one which he had already shown to Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it being one of a small bunch of keys which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter "M," and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations: —

"No BOOKS AT ANY TIME; the finest quality of linen and the most elegant clothes; NO EXERCISE; ALWAYS THE SAME JAILER; NO COMMUNICATIONS WITH ANY ONE. Musical instruments; every liberty which his welfare may require; to be boarded at 15 livres. M. de Baisemeaux can claim more, if the 15 livres be not sufficient."

"Ah," said Baisemeaux, "now I think of it, I shall claim it."

Aramis shut the book. "Yes," he said, "it is indeed from the hand of M. de Mazarin; I recognize the writing. Now, my dear governor," he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, "let us now turn, if you please, to our own little affairs."

"Well, what time for payment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself."

"We will not fix any particular period; give me a simple acknowledgment for one hundred and fifty thousand livres."

"When to be made payable?"

"At my demand. But you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do so."

"Oh, I am quite easy on that score," said Baisemeaux, smiling; "but I have already given you two receipts."

"Which I now destroy," said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to the governor, he destroyed them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly signed an acknowledgment of a debt of one hundred and fifty thousand livres, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor's shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgment into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. "Now," said Aramis, "you would not be

angry with me, would you, if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?"

"What do you mean?"

"By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?"

"Yes, quite true."

"Well?"

"That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way."

"Adieu, adieu!" and Aramis left, carrying with him the governor's blessings.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

At the very time when M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastille, a carriage drew up at Madame de Bellière's door, and at that still early hour a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Bellière, the latter was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette, her women being still in the next room. At the name, at the footsteps, of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Bellière ran to meet her. She fancied that she could detect in her friend's eye a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure.

Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "are you forgetting me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"

"I have not even seen the marriage *fêtes*."

"What are you doing with yourself, then?"

"I am getting ready to leave for Bellière."

"For Bellière?"

"Yes."

"Rustic in your tastes, then; I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."

"No, I am perfectly well."

"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."

"People say so many things."

"Yes, but this is extraordinary."

"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite!"

"Well, I was afraid of vexing you."

"Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper."

"Well, then, it is said that — Oh, really, I shall never be able to tell you."

"Do not let us talk about it, then," said Madame de Bellière, who detected the ill-nature which was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt consumed with curiosity.

"Well, then, my dear marchioness, it is said that for some time past you have mourned much less for poor M. de Bellière."

"It is an ill-natured report, Marguerite. I do mourn, and shall always mourn, my husband; but it is now two years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so."

"Why not? Your heart is so tender," said Madame Vanel, spitefully.

"Yours is so too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded." These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite's rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against the young woman's heart.

As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, "Well, Élise, it is said that you are in love;" and she looked fixedly at Madame de Bellière, who blushed without being able to prevent it.

"Women never escape slander," replied the marchioness, after a moment's pause.

"Oh! no one slanders you, Élise."

"What! people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!"

"In the first place, if it be true, there is no slander, but simply a piece of gossip. In the next place, — for you did not allow me to finish, — the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending yourself tooth and nail, shutting yourself up in your own house as in a fortress, — a fortress in other respects as impenetrable as that of Danaë, notwithstanding Danaë's tower was made of brass."

"You are witty, Marguerite," said Madame de Bellière, tremblingly.

"You always flatter me, Élise. To be brief, however, you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You see whether they calumniate you or not — But what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you?"

"I?"

"Yes; you are blushing and are quite silent."

"I was trying," said the marchioness, raising her beautiful eyes, brightened with an indication of approaching anger, — "I was trying to discover to what you, who are so learned in mythological subjects, could have alluded in comparing me to Danaë."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, laughing, "you were trying to guess that?"

"Yes; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in mathematics, — ah! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn, — do you not remember that if one of the terms were

given we were to find out the other? Therefore do you guess now?"

"I cannot conjecture what you mean."

"And yet nothing is more simple. You pretend that I am in love, do you not?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report."

"Certainly, a name is mentioned."

"Very well, my dear; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess that name, since you do not tell it to me."

"My dear marchioness, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures."

"It was the word 'Danaë' which you used that surprised me. 'Danaë' means a shower of gold, does it not?"

"That is to say that the Jupiter of Danaë changed himself into a shower of gold for her."

"My lover, then, — he whom you assign me — "

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and assign you no one."

"That may be; but those who are evilly disposed towards me."

"Do you wish to hear the name?"

"I have been waiting this half-hour for it."

"You shall hear it. Do not be shocked! he is a man high in power."

"Good!" said the marchioness, as she clinched her taper fingers like a patient at the approach of the knife.

"He is a very wealthy man," continued Marguerite; "the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is — "

The marchioness closed her eyes for a moment.

"It is the Duke of Buckingham," said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. The perfidiousness had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marchioness awaited, had precisely the same effect upon the poor woman as the badly sharpened axes which had hacked without killing Messieurs de Chalais and de Thou on their scaffolds had upon them. She recovered herself, however, and said: "I was perfectly right in calling you a witty woman, for you are making the time pass most agreeably. The joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham."

"Never?" said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

"I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris."

"Oh!" resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her unruly foot towards a paper which was rustling on the carpet near the window; "it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write."

The marchioness trembled, for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered. That envelope was sealed with the superintendent's arms. As she leaned back upon her sofa, Madame de Bellière covered the paper with the thick folds of her flowing silk dress, and so concealed it. Then she said, "Come, Marguerite, was it to tell me all these foolish things that you have come to see me so early in the day?"

"No; I came to see you, in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, you know, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and sitting beneath an oak or in some coppice used to talk of those whom we loved and who loved us."

"Do you propose that we should go out together now?"

"My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal."

"I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find, in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady hedges, a greensward covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived where we are sitting."

"I regret your refusal, my dear marchioness, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours."

"I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in my garden here, as it is under the oaks in the wood yonder."

"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching nearer to Vincennes, Marchioness, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marchioness suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of St. Mandé?"

"Of St. Mandé!" exclaimed Madame de Bellière; and the glances of the two women met each other like two unquiet swords at the beginning of a combat.

"You, so proud too?" said the marchioness, disdainfully.

"I, so proud!" replied Madame Vanel. "Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect; I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one and he weeps, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly."

Madame de Bellière could not restrain an involuntary movement.

"She is jealous," said Marguerite to herself.

"Then," continued the marchioness, "you are quite

enamored of the Duke of Buckingham, — I mean of M. Fouquet?" She felt the blow, and all her blood seemed to have flowed towards her heart. "And you wished to go to Vincennes, — to St. Mandé even?"

"I hardly know what I wished; you would have advised me perhaps."

"In what respect?"

"You have often done so."

"Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; but when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always."

"But M. Fouquet has not wounded you," said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

"You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; he is not known to me either by any favor or by any injury. But you have reason to complain of him; you are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like."

"Ah! you are prejudging the case."

"The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications."

"You overwhelm me," said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler preparing for a last struggle; "you take only my wicked passions and my weaknesses into account, and do not speak of the pure and generous feelings which I have. If at this moment I feel attracted towards Monsieur the Superintendent, if I even make an advance to him, — which I confess is very probable, — my motive for it is that M. Fouquet's fate deeply affects me, and that he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living."

"Ah!" said the marchioness, placing her hand upon her heart; "something new, then, has occurred?"

"Do you not know it?"

"I do not know anything about him," said Madame de Bellière, with that palpitation of anguish which suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

"My dear, in the first place, the king's favor is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert."

"Yes, so they say."

"It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot at Belle-Isle."

"I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet's honor."

Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner that Madame de Bellière could at that moment have joyfully plunged a dagger in Marguerite's bosom. "Dearest," continued Marguerite, "there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet's honor; his safety is concerned. Before three days are past the ruin of the superintendent will be complete."

"Stay!" said the marchioness, in her turn smiling; "that is going a little too fast."

"I said three days, because I wish to delude myself with a hope; but most certainly the catastrophe is not twenty-four hours distant."

"Why so?"

"For the simplest of all reasons, — that M. Fouquet has no more money."

"In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day who to-morrow can procure millions."

"That might be M. Fouquet's case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him and wrung it from every source; but these friends are dead."

"Money does not die, Marguerite : it may be concealed, but it can be looked for ; it can be bought or found."

"You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet ; you might show him the source whence he could obtain the millions for which the king asked him yesterday."

"Millions!" said the marchioness, in terror.

"Four, — an even number."

"Infamous!" murmured Madame de Bellière, tortured by that brutal pleasantry. "M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions," she replied courageously.

"If he has those which the king requires to-day," said Marguerite, "he will not perhaps possess those which the king will require of him in a month."

"The king will require money from him again?"

"No doubt ; and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of this poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money ; and when he has no more he will fall."

"It is true," said the marchioness, tremblingly ; "the plan is a bold one. But tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?"

"I think he does not like him. Now, M. de Colbert is powerful : he improves on close acquaintance ; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion ; he will make great strides."

"He will be superintendent?"

"It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear marchioness, why I felt myself impressed in favor of that poor man who once loved, nay, even adored me ; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets ; and why,

moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation or some good advice, — he would have understood the advance, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence."

The marchioness, bewildered and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the correctness and precision of aim of a discharge of artillery, hardly knew what answer to return; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a panther.

"Well," said Madame de Bellière, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, Marchioness, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront, — besides, I have my husband to consider. You say nothing to me. Very well; I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." And she rose smilingly, as though to take leave; but the marchioness had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said suddenly, "You do not accompany me to the door, then?"

The marchioness rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking any longer of the envelope, which had occupied her attention so much at the beginning of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without

even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered, a few words, which Madame de Bellière did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marchioness had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well grounded, advanced stealthily like a panther, and seized the envelope. "Ah!" said she, gnashing her teeth, "it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet that she was reading when I arrived;" and then she too darted out of the room.

During this interval the marchioness, having arrived behind the rampart as it were of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale, and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by a storm of wind, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded just as the rolling of Marguerite's carriage leaving the hotel was heard.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE.

The blow had been the more painful because it was unexpected. It was some time before the marchioness recovered; but once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events which had been announced to her. She returned, at the risk even of losing her life in that way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then, — dark menaces concealed under the semblance of public interest, — such were Colbert's manœuvres. An invidious delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, seductions no less wicked than the crime itself, — these gave occupation to Marguerite. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marchioness perceived, with sorrow rather than with indignation, that the king was an accomplice in a plot which savored of the duplicity of Louis XIII. in his advanced age, and of the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. But the spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed all its energy, and abandoned retrospective lamentation. The marchioness was not one to weep when it was necessary to act, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune when there were still means of relieving it. For ten minutes or more she buried her face in her icy hands, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a

steady hand and with a gesture full of energy. Her resolution was taken.

"Is everything prepared for my departure?" she inquired of one of her maids who entered.

"Yes, Madame; but it was not expected that your Ladyship would leave for Bellière for the next few days."

"All my jewels and articles of value, however, are locked up?"

"Yes, Madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your Ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country."

"But they are all in order, you say?"

"Yes, in your Ladyship's own room."

"The gold plate?"

"In the chest."

"And the silver plate?"

"In the large oaken closet."

The marchioness was silent, and then said calmly, "Let my goldsmith be sent for."

Her attendants vanished to execute the order. The marchioness, however, entered her own room, and inspected her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never until now had she bestowed so much attention upon valuables in which women take so much pride; never until now had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to the settings or their colors. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched.

The goldsmith, as he entered, found the marchioness thus occupied. "M. Faucheux," she said, "I believe that you supplied me with my gold service?"

"Yes, Madame the Marchioness."

"I do not now remember the amount of the bill."

"Of the new service, Madame, or of that which M. de Bellière presented to you on your marriage? — for I furnished both."

"Well, first of all, the new one."

"Madame, the ewers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the *epergne*, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the urns cost your Ladyship sixty thousand livres."

"*Mon Dieu!* No more?"

"Your Ladyship thought my bill very large."

"Yes, yes. I remember, in fact, that it was dear; but it was the workmanship, I suppose?"

"Yes, Madame; the designs, the chasings, and new patterns."

"What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me."

"A third of its value, Madame. But — "

"There is the other service, — the old one, that which belonged to my husband?"

"Yes, Madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the one I just mentioned. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand livres."

"Seventy thousand," murmured the marchioness; "but, M. Faucheux, there is also the silver service which belonged to my mother, — all that massive plate, you know, which I did not wish to part with on account of the associations connected with it."

"Ah! Madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your Ladyship, might not be in a position to keep their plate. At that time, Madame, they made nothing light as they do to-day. In working that, they worked in solid metal. But that

service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage."

"That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?"

"Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, each of which weighs five thousand livres, or both of them ten thousand."

"One hundred and thirty," murmured the marchioness "You are quite sure of your figures, M. Faucheux?"

"Positive, Madame. Besides, there is no difficulty in weighing them."

"The amount is entered on my books."

"Your Ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware."

"Let us now turn to another subject," said Madame de Bellière; and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.

"I recognize these emeralds," said the dealer; "for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken. Madame de Châtillon has the most beautiful set; she had them from Messieurs de Guise: but your set, Madame, are next."

"What are they worth?"

"Mounted?"

"No; supposing I wished to sell them."

"I know very well who would buy them," exclaimed M. Faucheux.

"That is the very thing I ask. They would be purchased, then?"

"All your jewels would be bought, Madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase it is of the very best, and what you purchase you do not part with."

"What could these emeralds be sold for, then?"

"A hundred and thirty thousand livres."

The marchioness wrote down upon her tablets with a pencil the amount which the jeweller mentioned. "This ruby necklace?" she said.

"Are they balas-rubies, Madame?"

"Here they are."

"They are beautiful, magnificent. I did not know you had these stones, Madame."

"What is their value?"

"Two hundred thousand livres. The stone in the centre is alone worth a hundred."

"Yes, yes; that is what I thought," said the marchioness. "As for diamonds, I have them in great numbers, — rings, necklaces, pendants, sprigs, ear-rings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux."

The jeweller took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and then silently made his calculations. "These stones," he said, "must have cost your Ladyship an income of forty thousand livres."

"You value them at eight hundred thousand livres?"

"Nearly so."

"It is about what I imagined; but the settings are not included."

"As is usual, Madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand livres."

"An agreeable sum."

"Yes, Madame, very agreeable."

"Will you accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?"

"But you do not intend to sell your diamonds, I suppose, Madame?" exclaimed the bewildered jeweller.

"Silence, M. Faucheux! Do not disturb yourself about

that; give me an answer simply. You are an honorable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years; you have known my father and mother, whom your own father and mother had served. I address you as a friend; will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?"

"Eight hundred thousand livres! it is enormous."

"I know it."

"It will be impossible to find it."

"Oh, I trust not!"

"But think, Madame, of the effect which will be produced in society by the report of the sale of your jewels."

"No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately; sell the stones only!"

"In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones, for Madame's toilet. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of six hundred thousand livres' worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful."

"When can you do so?"

"Within three days."

"Very well; the remainder you will dispose of among private individuals. For the present make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days."

"Madame, Madame, reflect, I entreat you; if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand livres."

"If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?"

"I do, Madame the Marchioness. I will not conceal from you that I shall make five thousand pistoles by the transaction."

"So much the better. In what way shall I have the money?"

"Either in gold, or in bills of the Bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert's."

"I agree," said the marchioness, eagerly; "return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible, do you understand?"

"Yes, Madame, but for Heaven's sake —"

"Not a word, M. Faucheux! By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?"

"Fifty thousand livres, Madame."

"That makes a million," said the marchioness to herself. "M. Faucheux, you will take away with you both the gold and the silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodelled for patterns more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, I say, and return me its value in gold at once."

"It shall be done, Madame the Marchioness."

"You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and direct him also to wait for me in a carriage."

"In Madame de Faucheux's carriage?" said the jeweller.

"If you will allow it; and I will call for it at your house."

"Certainly, Madame the Marchioness."

"I will direct three of my servants to convey the plate to your house." The marchioness rang. "Let the small van be placed at M. Faucheux's disposal," she said.

The jeweller bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud that the marchioness was about to have her plate melted down in

order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style.

Three hours afterwards the marchioness went to M. Faucheux's house, and received from him eight hundred thousand livres in bills on the Bank of Lyons, and two hundred and fifty thousand livres in gold enclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry to Madame Faucheux's carriage, — for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths. These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years.

The jeweller, though a millionnaire, was a modest man. He had purchased a venerable carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king's birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter; it was covered with allegorical paintings, and with clouds scattered over with stars of gold and silver gilt.

The noble lady entered this somewhat grotesque vehicle, sitting opposite to the clerk, who endeavored to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marchioness's dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marchioness to drive, to take the road to St. Mandé.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOWRY.

M. Faucheux's horses were respectable Percheron animals, with thick knees and legs which they had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they dated from the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet, therefore, as M. Fouquet's English horses, and consequently covered two hours in going to St. Mandé. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry.

The marchioness stopped the carriage before a door well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will be remembered, no less painful than that which brought her to it again on this second occasion. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it in the lock with her small white hand, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, anteroom, or boudoir rather, adjoining the salon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marchioness's feet. Madame de Bellière gave the coachman a louis, and the clerk a charming smile, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited thus, alone and shut in. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and

desires of the guest who was expected. The fire was laid; there were candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the sideboard, books upon the tables, and fresh-cut flowers in Japanese vases. One might almost have declared it to be an enchanted house.

The marchioness lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound revery. Her deep musings, however, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain sweetness. She saw displayed before her in that room a treasure, — a million which she had wrung from her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue cornflower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea naturally enough was the first to present itself to her mind; but although on reflection it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would, then, ring to summon M. Fouquet, and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found it. But being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said that the last particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said that her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants, — she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had driven away — whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures — had not already recognized her. In that case Fouquet would know all; what he might not know, he would guess: he would refuse to accept as a gift what he might perhaps have accepted under the name of

a loan, and thus the enterprise would end in failure. To secure success, it was necessary, then, that some steps should be seriously taken; and it was necessary, also, that the superintendent should comprehend the seriousness of his position, in order to yield compliance with the generous caprice of a woman. All the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him; and should this be insufficient, all the intoxicating influence of an ardent love, which in its resolute determination to carry conviction nothing would turn aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling? Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had robbed herself? No, he would resist; and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to Madame de Bellière with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger-thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears when they have gained a victory? "I must learn whether it be so, and must judge of that for myself," said the marchioness. "Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses and full of alloy? Who can tell whether that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come!" she exclaimed; "this is doubting and hesitating too much. To the proof!" She looked at the timepiece. "It is now seven o'clock," she said; "he must have arrived: it is the hour for signing his papers. Now,

then!" And rising with a feverish impatience, she walked to the mirror, into which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotion. She touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell; then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle which she had just undergone, she threw herself in utter abandonment upon her knees before a large couch, and buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterward she heard the spring of the door grate.

The door moved upon its invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, since, devotee of pleasure as he was, he obeyed such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was; and the melancholy expression of his mouth — an expression so rare with him — gave a new character to his countenance, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace on his breast all disarranged by his restless hand, the superintendent fixed his eyes, full of reverie, upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Bellière, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves, — its every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has gra-

ciously accorded to women, by reason of their very weakness, more than is granted to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marchioness divined in a single glance all the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in disappointments. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She rose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say that you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, Monsieur; and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."

"What is that, Madame?" asked Fouquet, astonished.

"That is, that you have never loved me so much as at this moment; in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh, Marchioness," said Fouquet, whose noble face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, "you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you and entreat forgiveness."

"Your forgiveness is granted, then." Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. "No, no!" she said; "sit here, by my side. Ah, that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind!"

"How do you detect it, Madame?"

"By your smile, which has just injured the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was. No secrets between friends!"

"Tell me, then, Madame, why have you been so harsh for these three or four months past?"

"Harsh?"

"Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?"

"Alas! my friend," said Madame de Bellière, sighing deeply, "it is because your visit to me caused you a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes which have already seen you might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; in short, because I find you so unhappy that I am not willing to add to your misfortunes."

Fouquet started; for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent, — to him who for the last few minutes had entertained only the hopes of the lover. "I unhappy?" he said, endeavoring to smile; "indeed, Marchioness, you will almost make me believe that I am so, by your own sadness. Are those beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity? Oh, I am hoping for another expression from them!"

"It is not I who am sad, Monsieur. Look in the mirror there! It is you who are so."

"It is true that I am somewhat pale, Marchioness; but it is from overwork. The king yesterday required a supply of money from me."

"Yes, — four millions; I know that."

"You know it?" exclaimed Fouquet, surprised; "and how do you know it? It was only at the card-party, after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king — "

"You perceive that I do know it; is not that sufficient? Well, go on, Monsieur! The money the king has required you to supply — "

"You understand, Marchioness, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered, — altogether a long affair. Since M. de

Mazarin's death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and that is the reason why I have not slept during the past night."

"Then you have the amount?" inquired the marchioness, with some anxiety.

"It would indeed be strange, Marchioness," replied Fouquet, cheerfully, "if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers."

"Yes, yes, I believe you either have or will have them."

"What do you mean by saying that I shall have them?"

"It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions."

"On the contrary, to me it seems almost an age, Marchioness; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer, if you please."

"On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you."

"I am at a loss to know your meaning," said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

"Tell me, Monsieur, is the office of superintendent an irremovable one?"

"You surprise me, Marchioness, for you speak as if you had an interest in the business."

"My reason is simple enough. I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish to know whether you are certain of your post."

"Really, Marchioness, I am at a loss what to reply, and I cannot conceive your meaning."

"Seriously, then, my dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in land, and am anxious to give it in charge to some friend who will turn it to account."

"Surely the matter is not pressing," said M. Fouquet.

"On the contrary, it is very pressing."

"Very well, we will talk of that by and by."

"By and by will not do, for my money is there," returned the marchioness, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold.

Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Bellière, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then, suddenly starting back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. "Marchioness, Marchioness," he murmured, "what opinion can you have of me when you make me such an offer?"

"Of you!" returned the marchioness. "Tell me, rather, what you yourself think of it."

"You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Do I not know your heart?"

"If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart which I offer you?"

"I have guessed rightly, then!" exclaimed Fouquet. "In truth, Madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner."

"Insult you!" she said, turning pale; "what singular delicacy of feeling! You love me, you have said. In the name of that love you have asked me to sacrifice my reputation and my honor; yet when I offer you my money, which is my own, you refuse me."

"Marchioness, you were at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honor. Allow me the liberty of preserving mine. Leave me to my ruin, — leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which sur-

round me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load even of my remorse; but, for Heaven's sake, Marchioness, do not crush me under this last infliction."

"A short time ago, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment; now you are wanting in feeling."

Fouquet pressed his clinched hand upon his heaving breast, saying, "Overwhelm me, Madame! I have nothing to reply."

"I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet."

"Yes, Madame, but you limited yourself to that."

"And what I am now doing is the act of a friend."

"No doubt it is."

"And you reject this mark of my friendship?"

"I do reject it."

"M. Fouquet, look at me!" said the marchioness, with glistening eyes; "I now offer you my love."

"Oh, Madame!" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have loved you for a long while past: women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, clasping his hands.

"Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have refused you. I was blind, as you were a little while since; but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love that I now offer you."

"Yes, your love, but your love only."

"My love, my person, my life! All, all, all!"

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Fouquet, dazzled.

"Do you wish my love?"

"Oh, you overwhelm me beneath the weight of my happiness!"

"Will you be happy, then, if I am yours, — yours entirely?"

"It will be the supremest happiness for me."

"Take me, then! If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple."

"Madame, Madame, do not tempt me!"

"My friend, my friend, do not refuse me."

"Think seriously of what you are proposing."

"Fouquet, but one word! Let it be 'No,' and I open this door," — and she pointed to that which led into the street, — "and you will never see me again. Let that word be 'Yes,' and I am yours entirely."

"Élise! Élise! But this coffer?"

"It contains my dowry."

"It is your ruin!" exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers; "there must be a million here."

"Yes, — my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Fouquet. "I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate such devotion. I accept the dowry."

"And take the woman with it," said the marchioness, throwing herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOD'S TERRITORY.

During the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes were travelling like boon companions, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in perfect harmony. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the best part of his adieux were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively, — a precaution on the part of the queen-mother, which saved him the distress of any further private conversation with Monsieur, and saved him also from the danger of seeing Madame again. Buckingham embraced De Guiche and Raoul; he assured the former of his high regard for him, and the latter of a firm friendship capable of triumphing over all obstacles and remaining unshaken by distance or lapse of time. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on ahead, and in the evening he set off in his travelling-carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away in tow, so to speak, by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance, he was absolutely obliged to endure the burden of his own evil thoughts and of his own caustic spirit.

Those of his friends in whom he had been able to confide had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke's superiority. Others, less brilliant but more sensi-

ble, had reminded him of the king's orders, which prohibited duelling. Others, again, — and they the larger number, — who from Christian charity or national vanity might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was that after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham's carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have received an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him sweetmeats, and spread over his knees the sable cloak which had been thrown upon the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame; of Monsieur, without speaking of his domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife; of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in-law; of the King of England, without alluding to his sister; of the state of the affections of each of the travellers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous.

In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable; and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman in wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his travelling companion. Elegant repasts, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses in the beautiful meadows which skirted the road; coursing, — for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him, — in such employments did they pass away the time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which encloses France a thousand times in its loving embraces before deciding to join its waters with the ocean. But in

quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter whom he had brought to Paris that he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her, and consequently a regret. Therefore, whenever now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings.

This delicacy would certainly have touched Buckingham and changed his feelings towards De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless, — nothing appeases them; a few ashes may sometimes cover them up, but beneath those ashes the smothered flames rage more furiously. After having exhausted all the means of amusement which the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants had arrived the evening before, and had chartered a boat for the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or lying broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within two or three cannon-shots from the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipment from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been shipped, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck of the vessel in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and not a hair was turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that in short voyages horses, with the best of food before them, such as they would have coveted on land, refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while.

By degrees the duke's entire equipage was transported

on board the yacht. His men then came to inform him that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman; for no one supposed that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with my Lord Duke than those of friendship. Buckingham desired the captain of the yacht to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added, also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation.

As he said this, he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of a deep purple color in the horizon, and an amphitheatre of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disk to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of mountains whose summits were heaped one upon another. The whole amphitheatre was tinged at its base by a kind of blood-like foam, fading away towards the summit into opal and pearl-like tints. The sea, too, was tinged with the same reflection, and upon the crest of every azure wave danced a point of light, like a ruby exposed to the reflection of a lamp. The mildness of the evening; the smell of the sea, so dear to contemplative minds; a stiff breeze setting in from the east and blowing in harmonious gusts; in the distance the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky; here and there on the horizon lateen-sails bending over the blue sea, like the wings of a sea-gull about to plunge, — all contributed to a spectacle which indeed well merited admiration.

A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, among whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. Buckingham, dressed very simply in a gray satin vest and doublet of violet-colored velvet, wearing his hat drawn over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, was taken no more notice of than was De Wardes, who was dressed in black like an attorney.

The duke's attendants had received directions to keep a boat in readiness at the jetty-head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them, — "whatever may happen," he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood.

Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes: "I think, Monsieur, it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing."

"I await your orders, my Lord, but —"

"But, you mean, we are still upon the king's soil."

"Exactly."

"Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circular pool of water? The pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to God; for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king's maps. Do you observe it?"

"Yes; but we can hardly reach it now without getting our feet wet."

"Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises on every side, leaving

the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?"

"I shall be perfectly happy wherever my sword may have the honor of crossing your Lordship's."

"Very well, then. I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes; but it is most essential, I think, that you should be able to say to the king, 'Sire, I did not fight upon your Majesty's territory.' Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle; but since Port-Royal you abound in subtleties of expression. Do not let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry, M. de Wardes; for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in."

"My reason for not walking faster, my Lord, was that I did not wish to precede your Grace. Are you still on dry land, my Lord Duke?"

"Yes, just at present. Look yonder! my servants are afraid that we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you see how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?"

"You will observe, my Lord, that in turning your back to them you will have the sun full in your face."

"Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour, and it will soon have disappeared. Do not be uneasy at that!"

"As you please, my Lord. It was out of consideration for your Lordship that I made the remark."

"I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?"

"As you please, my Lord."

"It is more convenient."

"Then I am all ready."

"Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to the French territory. We could fight in England, or else upon my yacht."

"We are exceedingly well placed here, my Lord; only I have the honor to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time —"

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet, and threw it on the sand. De Wardes did likewise. Both their bodies — white, like two phantoms, to those who were looking at them from the shore — were thrown strongly into relief by a reddish-violet shadow with which the sky became overspread.

"Upon my word, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes, "we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?"

"I have sunk up to the ankles," said Buckingham, "without reckoning that the water is still rising upon us."

"It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, Monsieur the Duke," said De Wardes; and he drew his sword, — a movement imitated by the duke.

"M. de Wardes," then said Buckingham, "one final word, if you please. I am about to fight you because I do not like you, — because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain passion which I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that at this moment I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a wicked man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that if you survive this engagement, you will in the future work great mischief to my friends. That is all I have to say to you, M. de Wardes;" and Buckingham saluted.

"And I, my Lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto; but now that you have divined my character I hate you, and will do all I can to kill you;" and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning meeting in a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other and feel their way to contact. Both were practised swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his sword arrested; he had just touched Buckingham's shoulder.

The duke's sword sank, as his arm was lowered. "Oh!" said he.

"You are touched, my Lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.

"Yes, Monsieur, but only slightly."

"Yet you quitted your guard."

"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered. Let us go on, if you please, Monsieur;" and disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded De Wardes in the breast.

"Touched also," he said.

"No," said De Wardes, standing firm in his place.

"I beg your pardon; but seeing your shirt all red —" said Buckingham.

"Well," said De Wardes, furiously, "it is now your turn;" and with a terrible lunge he pierced Buckingham's fore-arm, the sword passing between the two bones.

Buckingham, feeling his right arm paralyzed, stretched out his left arm, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, thrust it through his breast.

De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine stain than that which it had taken from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead; he felt the terrible danger with which he was menaced, for the sea was rising. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort, and an exclamation of pain, he tore out the blade which had remained in his arm, and turning to De Wardes, said, "Are you dead, Monsieur?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."

"Well, what is to be done? Let us see; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.

"Impossible," said De Wardes; then falling back again, he said, "Call to your people, or I shall be drowned."

"Halloa!" shouted Buckingham; "boat there! quick, quick!"

The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach. Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round De Wardes's body, and raised him up. The wave ascended to the duke's waist, but could not move him. He immediately began to walk towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces when a second wave, rushing onwards, — higher, more menacing, more furious, than the former, — struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over, and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the sand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment four of the duke's sailors, who comprehended the danger,

threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme when they observed that their master became covered with blood in proportion as the water with which it was impregnated flowed towards his knees and feet. They wished to carry him away.

"No, no!" exclaimed the duke; "take M. de Wardes on shore first."

"Death to the Frenchman!" cried the English, sullenly.

"Wretched knaves!" exclaimed the duke, drawing himself up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, "obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes's safety to be looked to first, or I will have you all hanged!"

The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary and the steward in their turn leaped into the sea, and approached De Wardes, who no longer showed any sign of life.

"I commit this man to your care as you value your lives," said the duke. "Take M. de Wardes on shore!" They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, which the tide never reached. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, themselves entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him unspeakable suffering.

The duke's secretary drew from his pocket a filled purse, and handed it to the one among those present

who appeared of most importance, saying, "From my master, his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every conceivable care may be taken of M. de Wardes." Then, followed by his men, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, after he had seen De Wardes out of danger. By this time it was high tide. The embroidered coats and silk sashes were lost; many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke's and De Wardes's clothes to the shore; and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke's doublet, under the belief that it was his own, and they carried him in their arms towards the town.

"To that I have nothing to answer," said D'Artagnan, who knew the vanity of the new baron. "*Au revoir*, then, my friend."

"*Au revoir*, dear captain," said Porthos. "You know that when you would like to come and see me you will always be welcome in my barony."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "on my return from the campaign I will come."

"The equipage of Monsieur the Baron awaits him," said Mousqueton, and the two friends separated after shaking hands.

D'Artagnan stood on the doorstep, following Porthos with melancholy look as he went away. But at the end of a few yards Porthos stopped short, hit his forehead, and returned.

"I recollect," said he.

"What?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Who that mendicant was that I killed."

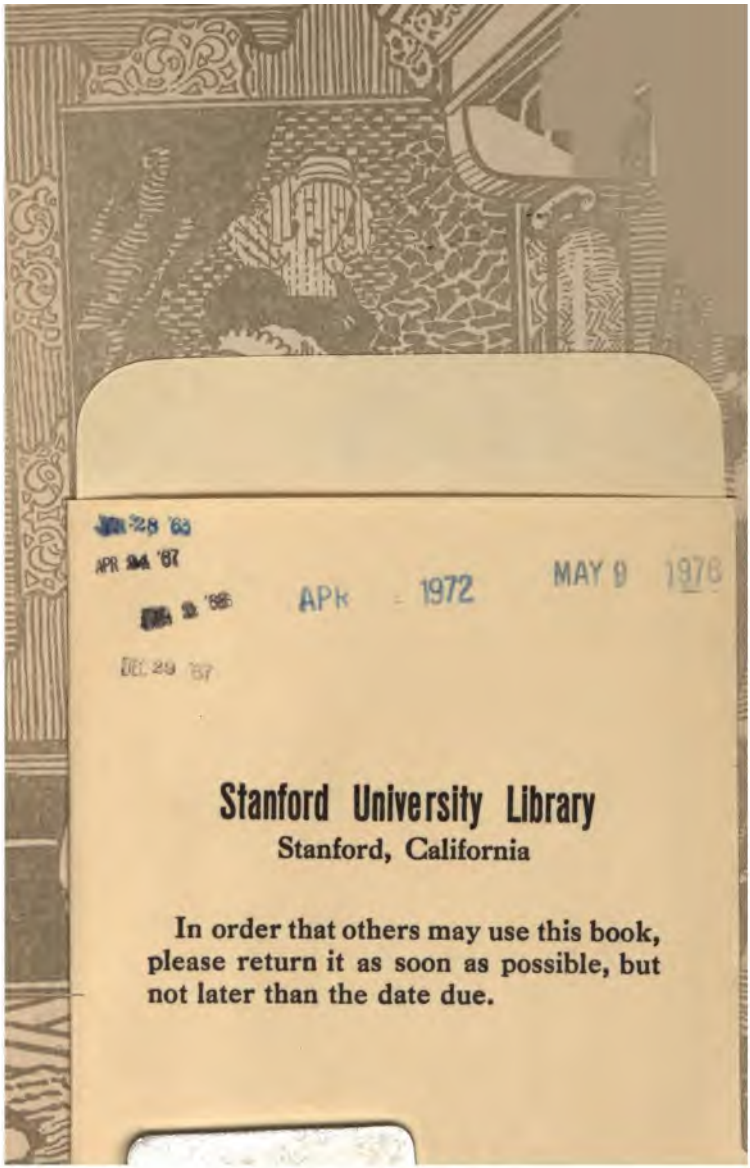
"Ah, really! who is it?"

"Why, that rascal Bonacieux;" and Porthos, delighted with thus relieving his mind, rejoined Mousqueton, and soon disappeared round the corner of the street.

D'Artagnan remained for a moment immovable and pensive; then turning round, he saw the fair Madeleine, who, perplexed at the new grandeur of D'Artagnan, was standing at the door.

"Madeleine," said the Gascon, "give me the apartment on the first floor; I am obliged to keep up my dignity now that I am captain of the Musketeers. But always keep my room on the fifth floor; one never knows what may happen."

THE END.



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